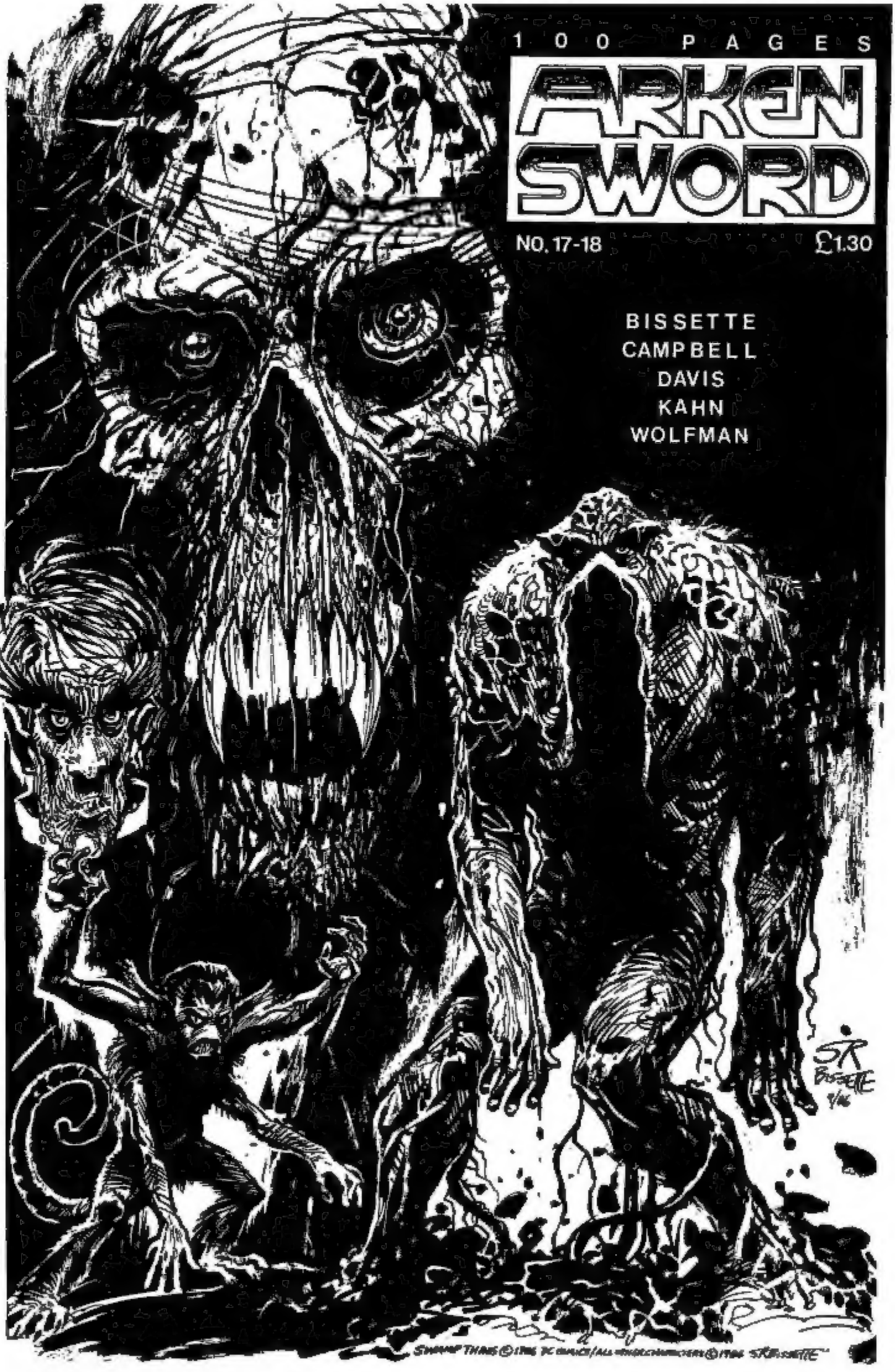

100 PAGES
ARKEN SWORD
NO. 17-18
£1.30
BISSETTE
CAMPBELL
DAVIS
KAHN
WOLFMAN
SWAMP THING © 1986 DC COMICS/ALL OTHER CHARACTERS © 1986 STEVE BISSETTE

EDITORIAL

And in the beginning...there was the creator(s).

There has been a lot of talk recently about ownership of characters, creator's rights and all that jazz. I can see this becoming a very hot issue over the coming months,since Jack Kirby is coming over to this country in September. Marvel have asked Kirby to sign away all the rights to all the characters he helped create. In addition Marvel are only returning 58 pages of original artwork at the present time, with the possibility of more in the future (presumably when all the stock is sorted out.) But Kirby must sign away all rights he may have to the characters he created in order to get his pages back.

Each comics company has its own way of dealing with who owns what, and who gets what, so let me give you a whistle-stop tour of the various companies and their policies. It may be helpful if you read the interviews in this issue first, to get the gist of what's going on.

Starting with DC, the company owns the characters. There's no doubt about that. However, DC do give a certain amount of the profits to the people who create characters that make them money. Also, the team on a book that is selling well get a percentage of the profits. The artwork is returned to the teams on every book.

At First we have recently seen a steady acquisition of characters from other companies through the sale of rights, the transference of rights, or whatever: Nexus, Badger & Whisper from Capital; Starslayer, Elric from Pacific; Dreadstar from Epic. But at the same time we've seen Howard Chaykin's American Flagg! being written and drawn by other people. When Chaykin came over in '84 he said he didn't actually own the character, which really surprised me. I mean, I thought that that's what the Independents meant: owning the characters you created so that you could make more money and do what you wanted. But no, it turns out that First have exactly the same sort of system as DC, only in the direct sales outlets only.(But that may change soon.)

Other Independent companies may have different situations for each product. They may own the characters, or just have first printing rights only, or whatever. It's not all that clear-cut who owns what.

In Britain, IPC own everything and can do reprints with no extra payment to the creators. Just recently they've been returning the original artwork to the 2000AD artists (on receipt of enough money to make copies for reprints.) Perhaps they realise how many artists and writers have gone to America and so wish to keep the ones that are still here.

Marvel UK give some rights to the creators, as shown by Alan Moore's decision to with-hold the Captain Britains he wrote from Marvel USA. Of course this meant that Alan Davis couldn't get a penny from them. Nor could any of the people from before or after Alan Moore's tenure, since those bits couldn't be printed either. That is the down side of creator's rights.

CONTENTS

Halo Jones	Bernard Leak	4
Nexus	Fiona Jerome	10
Janette Kahn	Paul Duncan	12
Red's Luck	Phil Elliott	15
Eddie Campbell	Paul Duncan	19
American Gothic	Martin Crookall	32
Marv Wolfman	Paul Duncan	40
Rocketeer	Pete Scott	55
Alan Davis	Lee Chester/PD	56
Alan Davis Competition		72
Cutting Comments	U. Lot	76
Albert the Mouse	John Jackson	76
Nasty Chuck	John Jackson	80
Stephen Bissette	Paul Duncan	82
Next Issue	Clare Voyant	99
Back Page	Alan Davis	100

Arken Sword 17/18 is £1.30 (£1.50 by post,£3 to USA) from Paul Duncan.

A 5-issue subscription is £3 (£6 to USA). 8 & 9 are £1 the pair. 12 (Walt Simonson) is 70p. 13/14 (Bolland,Chaykin,Elliott, Moore) is £1.30. 15(Gibson) sold out at the moment. 16(Ron Smith, Fabry, Wagner) is 70p. Short Fuse 1 (Stringer,Elliott,Georgiou,Jackson,Cousins,Simpson, Davis,Duncan,Campbell,Dakin,Myra,Harwood,Simonson, Gibson,Bolland,Gibbons,Emerson,O'Neill,Ron Smith) is £1. SF2 (the 1st 7 above,Talbot,Bolton,Shelton, Welding,Way,Neary,John Romita Jr/Dan Green,Robin Smith,Pinsent and Mike Higgs) is 80p. £1.50 for both. Prices include postage.

THIS IS A DIGITAL FACSIMILE OF THE ORIGINAL FANZINE.
COPYRIGHT REMAINS WITH THE ORIGINAL ARTISTS,
AUTHORS, COMPANIES AND PUBLISHERS.
NOT FOR RESALE OR INCLUSION IN ANY
COMMERCIAL VENTURE

EDITORIAL

Another down side is the way Warrior turned out, and we can still see the ruins in Marvelman.

I'm not too sure what the rights situation in Europe is, but most of the creators seem to own their work. I even heard of one artist becoming a millionaire with less than a 100 completed pages, simply because he kept reselling his art to different markets.

At Marvel there's a royalty for the amount of copies sold, like at DC, but you can create your own characters, have them published at Epic, and still own them. Recently, Jim Starlin decided to change publisher and moved Dreadstar from Epic to First. However, because Marvel is such a young company, the copyright on all its main characters are coming up for renewal in a few years, at which Kirby could contest creator's rights.

I doubt that he could contest ownership.

I'll probably get into a lot of trouble saying this, because of Marvel's present bad image in the fan press, but I have no objection to Marvel owning all the characters that Kirby helped create. I believe that's a basic right of any publisher that has the faith to go ahead and put a lot of money into a project. I know that's against the artistic view ("I thought of it so I should own it") but if the creators want over-all control they should either publish it themselves (like Dave Sim or Wendy and Richard Pini) or arrange a deal with someone else. Jack Kirby didn't really have this opportunity, so with the past Seigel and Shuster case as a precedent Kirby should get some sort of creators rights recompense.

I object strongly to the underhand way in which Marvel have treated Kirby. Firstly they offer the return of a piffling amount of pages from the 1000s he did, and at the same time they ask him to sign away all the rights he has to the characters.

I hope that Kirby gets as much out of this as he rightly deserves.

Now that the British fans are so annoyed about creators rights, perhaps they'll look closer to home and help Frank Bellamy's widow and Lee Baxendale to fight their respective cases.

Just think, 10 years ago creators rights,reprint rates, and royalties on sales were largely unheard of. It's not perfect yet, but it's getting there.

Just a note to tell you that next issue will be distributed throughout Britain and the US by Titan, (advertisers take note), I'm writing a comic drawn by Phil Elliott, putting together Short Fuse 3, and other things you'll hear about soon. Bye,

Paul

ART CREDITS
Stephen Bissette Cover,31,34,38,81-99
Eddie Campbell 19-30
Martin Chaplin 37,40,53,56(logo),79(bottom)
Paul Chekran 41,47,54
Alan Davis 3,56-74,100
Phil Elliott 15-18,29(bottom),31
Ian Gibson 4-10
Dave Harwood 78
John Jackson 76,80,81
Pete Martin 3,11
Pete Ventura 42
Chris Walsh 32,36
Chris Williams 13,35,41-46,48-53(top)

Advertising Rates

Full Page (273 X 185 mm) - £30
Half Page (185 X 136 mm) - £15
Quarter Page (136 X 92 mm) - £8

Please enclose the money with your advert.
The deadline for Ark 19 is July 30.

Please make all cheques/POs/Money Orders payable to Paul Duncan.

All work is copyright to the respective authors and artists & all names and characters are copyright to their respective creators and companies.

The Ballad Of HALO JONES

Words: Bernard Leak
Pictures: Ian Gibson

Halo Jones (for short) is a series, now stopped, which ran in 2000AD. The first episode covered 6 sides, but all the others have taken up 5 sides each; they can be found in Progs 376-385 (Book I), 405-415 (Book II, with a Prologue) and 451-466 (Book III, again with a Prologue). It was originally created in a brainstorming session between Alan Moore and Ian Gibson, who continued as writer and artist respectively for the duration of the series. It was at one stage to have continued for 7 books, lasting the whole of Halo Jones' life from late adolescence to death; but it has succumbed to unpopularity and editorial pressure. To some extent Alan may have lost interest, but this has been aggravated by the editorial directive to make the later books simpler and more action-packed than the first, which was apparently found too boring and confusing (simultaneously?). Okay, with only 2 riots, one essential murder, a mere handful of threats of gang violence and one person taking up psychosis as a way of life it might be thought too tame for the average consumer of Judge Dredd. Sigh. It is important to realise that the story as we have it is not fully wound up, nor has the lapses of decades allowed it to wind down. The third book, like the others, ends with Halo "going out"; an excelsior theme apparently extensible to infinity, which was not the intention. On the other hand, as often happens with Alan's longer works, there are distinct shifts between the books in the central preoccupation of the story, and it is tempting (and perhaps futile) to see in what we have an underlying unity. The links from one book to the next are really narrative ones, and attempts to force a thematic unity do violence to the story. Necessarily, then, comments fall into rather disjointed clusters, with shifts of perspective in-between.

It must be said now that the shifts of perspective are not a narrative subtlety. In some ways the story is not sufficiently tightly constructed to allow of a unified perspective, and some incidental details seem to have got out of hand. It seems impossible to tell, for instance, how many people can read, or what languages; books seem to be archaic, but pamphlets are still issued, as is a fighting woman's version of Playgirl, and we are assured that "only one being in a thousand still writes" - a rather disconcerting assertion, since Halo's committal of herself to paper has been familiar and taken for granted for most of the series. Moreover, the relationship between women and men in the army is exceedingly foggy, although the decision to make the "poor bloody infantry" out of women is presumably intended to say something about gender roles. Just how irritating these details appear depends perhaps principally on one's desire to write a review, but they show a certain slackness, for which Alan Moore must shoulder the responsibility. Additionally, the dialogue seems for the most part to creak along; Moore's dialogue ought to be better recognised than it is, but the seemingly effortless brilliance which he has brought to (say) his first 15 issues of Swamp Thing appears here only fitifully. That Moore's direct narration (in captions) should be held up for praise - it strikes me as being mostly glutinous with emotional excess - while hardly anyone notices the rhythmic and emotional exactness of his best conversations makes me want to bite heads off. Halo Jones, however, only rarely comes up with the goods - which is not to say that Moore with a head-cold is not better than nearly anyone else on a good day. Not even Gilberto Hernandez, with his strangely isolated figures talking at each other, has an equal grasp of conversational dynamics; not even Jaime, who perhaps does, can adapt his dialogue so sensitively to particular circumstances and relationships. Best of all here is the opening of episode 14 of Book III, "Breakfast in the Ruins"; but I'll come onto that later.

Ian Gibson has worked out his own way of getting round the IPC rules on panel progression (i.e., left to right on each line, then down to the next line, and keep the panels square); although the panels read in just that order (with occasional minor deviations, like circular panels, staying on the windy side of the law) he will draw great spacious background panels with narrative panels as inserts on the page, or build up a picture fragmented into panels; not just in the familiar split-panel fashion, but as it is seen in Prog 385, where on one page the Clara Pandy dominates the page from the centre, and a welder can be seen attending to it on each panel. It's not just big and important, it's an object of solicitude, while the human beings gather round it in a kind of devotion. Gibson is also remarkably good at creating a fluid

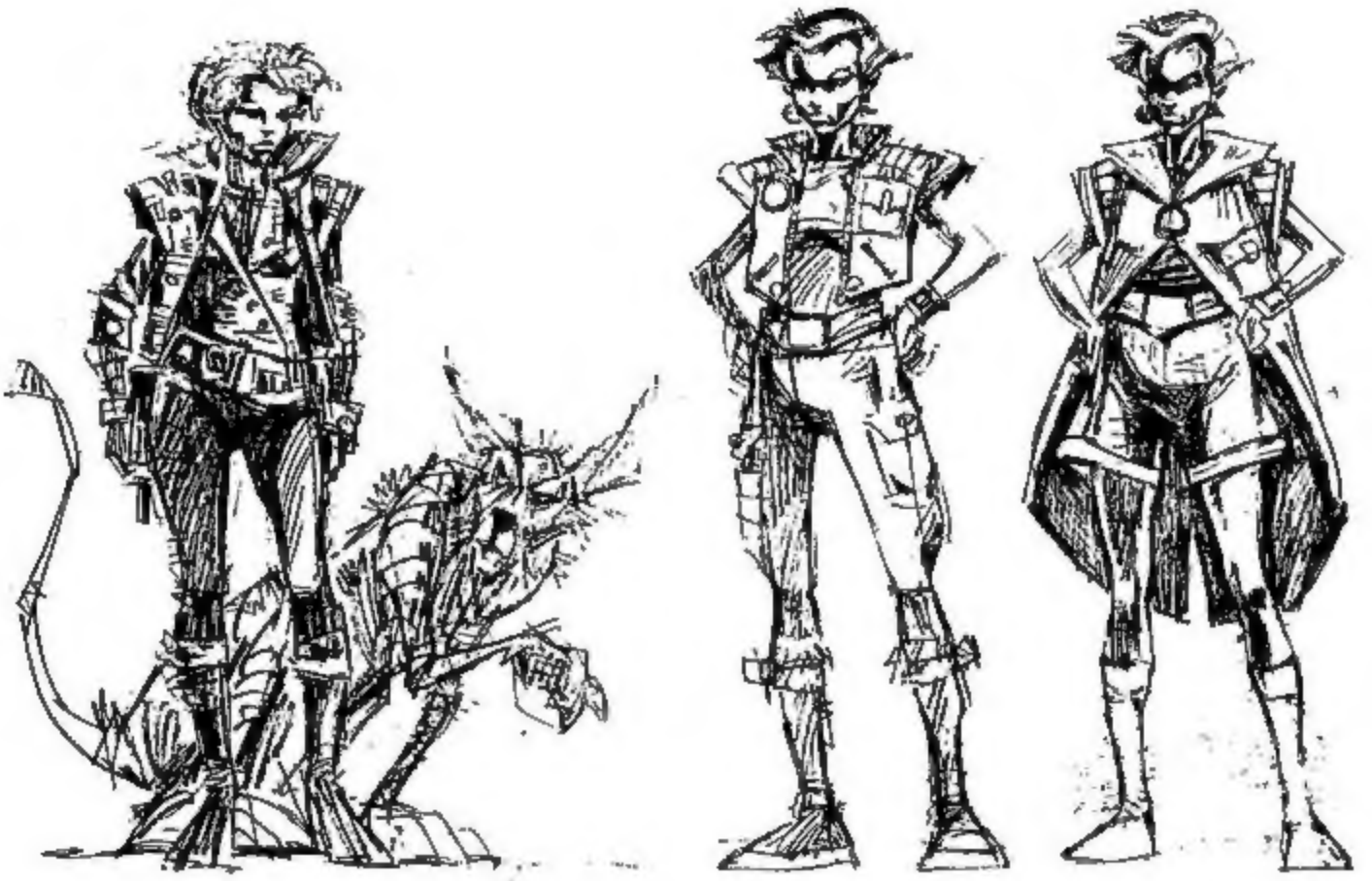
Left: Halo Jones.

Above: The Different Drummers.
Right: Ludy.

movement from panel to panel with changes of viewpoint; he prowls restlessly around his subject matter with a very sure sense of how far he can shift between panels without jolting. Examples multiply so fast that it seems pointless to specify, but a virtuoso display of the rules being bent while retaining perfect clarity is in the very last episode, on page 3, where recollections of the Clara Pandy, and visions of horror on the planet Charon (unvisited, so necessarily imagined) form a background with no defined panel boundaries to two heavy black-edged boxes in which Luis Cannibal stands trial. It's fair to add that (discounting the practical improbabilities) the page is very well written; for once Moore has picked a subject large enough to call out all of his emotional reserves without becoming gross. Perhaps because of this, he has indeed pulled back from the limits of what he might have said; an admirable restraint. "They ate the whole world and gnawed the bones of its children" manages to contain its intensity by its ambiguity - just what is "the whole world", and who are "its children"? This is not carelessness; underlying the ambiguity is a deep interrogative exactness, which identifies the area of its concern in attempting to straddle it.

There is more to be said about that page, from a different angle. It begins and ends with Halo's eyes. Close-up images of Halo's face, with the eyes either filling the picture or at least very precisely rendered, have recurred throughout the series; often associated with waking up. The repetition here encapsulates the sense of revelation and crisis; the second picture shows the General reflected in Halo's eye-balls. This isn't a trick I'm very fond of - it interposes the viewer between the eye and what it sees, which is very intrusive and somehow existentially disturbing - but here the suggestion works. The point is not just that Halo is looking at the General, but that she feels that he has invaded her; the depths of her eyes are a privacy on which he has set his mark. And the desolation of Charon is reminiscent of all the scenes of abandonment and decay which have punctuated Halo's life; the deserted bar on Charlemagne, Fwuc, Hispus, Lobis Loyo.

Mention of close-up images of faces recalls another distinctive feature of Gibson's work, which is its stylistic variety. Instantly distinctive, his work refuses to lie even on a single continuous scale, but extends outwards. Despite occasional carelessness - in particular, Luis Cannibal's face is sometimes shown so craggily as to make it polygonal, as in the first inset panel of the given page - the assurance with which he handles people is refreshing. In fact, Ian Gibson is not enormously imaginative in portraying inanimate objects; his treatment of fabrics has an undifferentiated sameness (compare the rags of the Different Drummers with the cloth hanging from the branch, for instance), and his preferred shapes for clothes and high-tech artefacts alike are smooth curved surfaces with cruelly angled curved edges (where they just stop) or smoothly-curved frames with rounded corners (when there is a frame). The best exception so far has been the helmet worn by the soldiers on Lobis Loyo, with its calculated ugliness of sharp straight edges against the faces behind, but this unfortunately looks very uncomfortable as well, which makes it rather improbable. Fwuc bears altogether too much resemblance to cinematic images of a Western ghost-town, even down to the shape of the saloon-bar doors. Most interesting is his depiction of space, which I will take up at a more appropriate point. People, however, are his forte; General Cannibal is usually shown with the massive solidity of a Renaissance master, perhaps even of Stanley Cook's famous self-portrait. Halo varies from a shadowed hardness of edge in close-up to a soft-edged, dreamier rendering (as when she meets the medical team in "A Soldier's Things", issue 457); the last panel of the series is something else again; and the smaller figures illustrate the expressive flexibility of his more general approach. This approach is devoted to line-work, without conspicuous rendering of masses, & it is taut and sinewy - even General Cannibal's arms become thin in this version - with sharply-marked joints but comparatively unimportant curves. The panel in "The Gravity of the Situation" in which the soldiers emerge in a vast hall, dominated by the figure of Lot's wife, shows them immediately recognisable by posture, as well as by their chosen grouping; the treatment of "Life Sentence" (who does not appear to have a name, although it would appear on her uniform) is especially

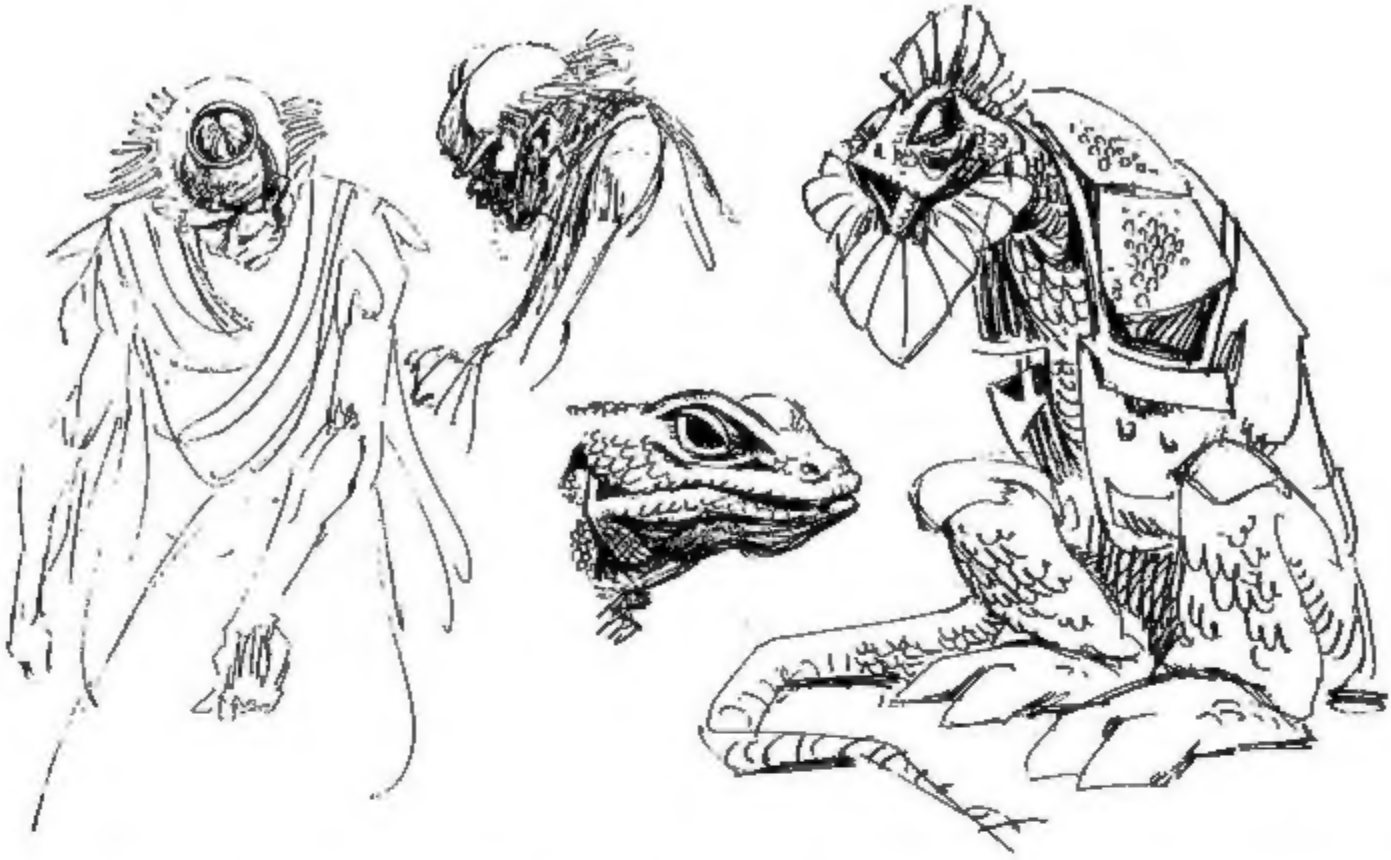


Bottom Left: Brinna. Above: Halo in various fashions, plus an early rendering of Toby.

appropriate.

I've had the privilege of seeing Alan's scripts for two episodes,"The Gravity of the Situation" and "The Crush", and it's interesting to see how the labour of creation has been broken down. On the whole, Ian Gibson has been very faithful in following Alan Moore's suggestions, although occasionally he adjusts the pacing of short narrative sequences by putting in an extra panel, or rearranging the distribution of events. On the whole, though, his only persistant change is the "invisible"one of organising the dialogue across panels instead of within them, so that it forms a link between them. This is part of the way in which he creates smoothness in panel progressions which might otherwise lie together in a kind of static balance; not necessarily worse, but different. Background detail not immediately tied to future developments has been left very freely to Ian Gibson, and he has enjoyed himself immensely; it would be pleasant to know just how much of the Hoop was purely at his discretion. I'd also like to know whether it was Alan's idea to put (in "The Fast-Forward War",issue 463) yet another parody of a certain well-known battle-picture (which Ian has parodied before)...

I would like to dwell further on Ian Gibson's work, but I feel like a wandering alien already; I don't have the necessary expertise to discuss sources and influences, and without an adequate background examination of the pictures "in themselves" falls apart into accumulations of tiny details. Gibson provides these in happy multitudes - the symbol of the Earth forces reappears on Luis Cannibal's helmet, for instance, with the snakes' heads which mark his physical presence; the washrooms on the Hoop provide seperate accomodation for men, women and Proximen (but not Alphans, it seems; another oversight?); the small and sketchy heads inside the gravity suits on Mnab, which become more substantial than their inhabitants - but I must resign these to more appreciative eyes than mine. However, at the level of general impressionism (which I mistrust) I must say that Gibson's drawing is deeply expressive and capable of its own ragged beauty; and that his devotion to drawing people rather than their property I would like to see more widely emulated. His work on this series, if necessarily more rushed, seems to me more impressive than the very finished but light-weight whimsy of Grain. It seems coupled with a subtly irritating quality in his handling of animals, which seem somehow anthropomorphised; this is most true of Her Serenity in the last episodes, but appears also in the haulage beast seen on Hispus, and the Rat-King. The expressiveness of line and posture which he achieves with such seeming effortlessness with people fail flounderingly with animals. The rats look appropriately ugly, and the dolphins appropriately elegant, but the standards of appropriateness seem to have been drawn from deep wells of



Left: Different designs for the Different Drummers.
Right: A Proximan.

---

cliche, not from their actual role in the story. Four legs bad, no legs good, perhaps?

Part 1, as I have already indicated, scintillates more than its sequels; it also manages, a little surprisingly, to anticipate their themes. It does this, not by exhibiting them in the action - I'm not going to contradict myself as quickly as that! - but by bringing to the reader's attention details of historical background which are not immediately important to the story, but which are to be referred to later. The means chosen is the holographic newscaster-figure Swifty Frisko, who interrupts the daily life of the characters with short news bulletins, from which they try to glean relevant information; naturally their sense of relevance is rather different from that of the people outside the Hoop where they live, and altogether different from that of the passengers on the Clara Pandy in Book II. (Inconsistency in identifying the parts as Books, Parts or Acts is Alan Moore's rather than mine.) As previously (most remarkably in the episode "Video" of "V for Vendetta") this allows for a second narrative line parallel with the visible action on the panels. What appears prominently in the Hoopsider's view of things is the fate of the Clara Pandy, which is left in the hands of Lux Roth Chop, the fabulously rich quasi-divine figure who runs the world's main food industry, based on algae. Almost unnoticed in the interstices are the indications of the background to his eventual decision to rescue the ship from the "dismembler yards"(!). Behind his legendary capriciousness is a quiet deliberation which the news broadcasts contrive to obscure. His importance, at least on the Hoop, is hard to exagerate; the business in bizarre fashion-led personal weaponry is in his hands (Rodice's zanadas are marked with his trade-mark), his companies manufacture the ventilation system of the Hoop, and the principal hope for those wishing to leave the Hoop is apparently to be taken up by the talent scouts of Chop leisure. This seems a little premature, since LRC himself must have taken up the business as a young child (just how young he is only appears in later books); but certainly he has been a fixture on the Hoop for some time. Even his parties have passed into popular speech on the Hoop as synonymous with important affairs.

Meanwhile, the central characters get on with their lives; to them the Clara Pandy is a symbol of freedom, for them virtually unattainable but inspiring to contemplate. As one rioter cries, hearing that she is to be broken up,"She's been all over!" Looking back, in the Prologue to Book II, this aspect is caught up in the impressive if unexplained phrase "She saw places that aren't even <u>there</u> anymore!" - said of Halo herself. Each of them (except perhaps Halo) succumbs to the influence of the Hoop; some are destroyed within it, which Halo sees as a destruction <u>by</u> it. This conviction of hers is to be questioned later; but it appears immediately as a reaction against loss. Ludy is driven by fear, and rejects her own chance to escape in favour of anonymous absorption in the Different Drummers, who terrify others. Brinna is rich enough to leave the Hoop, but does not; she wants to remain, and trusts to a security that fails her, the dog Toby. I don't quite "read" Brinna's situation in the same way that Alan Moore says he intended it; he sees her as helpless to leave the Hoop because of her emotional attachment to it; I see it rather as a failure to realise that she <u>should</u> move out. That she is rich does in fact isolate her from her housemates - note Halo and Rodice discussing what to buy for her - and her presence in a deprived area makes it necessary for her to resort to extreme protection, in the shape of Toby. She believes that she is safe with Toby; and in the end it proves otherwise. This is a statement about wealth and security, and a disturbing one. It appears, in retrospect, that Ludy dies in the Red Wednesday Massacre, although this isn't stated directly. Rodice is in yet another situation. She is so perfectly adapted to life in the Hoop that she cannot leave it; she requires its walls around her, and without them she breaks down. She does not really believe at first that Halo is going to leave their house;she continues for a year not to believe that Halo is not coming back. She's trapped by more than her agrophobia; she needs the Hoop, and excursions away from it must be seen to have an end or they become unendurable.

The effect of all this on Halo is complex, and creates her sense that the Hoop is destructive mentioned earlier. The sense that she has a safe home is destroyed when Brinna is found dead in it; the sense that she can find freedom in vicarious hope is destroyed when Ludy joins the Different Drummers. Alan has always been good at showing women fierce with indignation - why not men, I

wonder? - and he gives Judy some of the most striking words in the Ballad as she repudiates the pressure that Halo has put on her. "I don't want to end up dead in a side-artery just to make you proud of me!" Coming on eachother's heels these incidents force Halo back on herself, leaving her at once desolated, guilty and rootless. Escape is not in itself a solution to her problems, but it offers itself to her as a precondition of any such solution; she blames the Hoop, and thinks as she leaves that she has left her past behind.

The Hoop is densely realised - more so, perhaps, than any other part of the background to the story. After all, the longest account of a shopping trip in the history of comics gives plenty of opportunity for background! Rodice is first seen brushing her hair in a mirror which doesn't reverse handedness. This typifies the careful presentation of a high-technology culture devoted (on the Hoop, with no manufacturing industry) to consumer goods. Clothes are simply destroyed rather than washed; yet in the midst of this conspicuous waste, food has to be conserved, and meat is not apparently available. Not even Brinna, it seems, buys it as a luxury. What the Hoop does offer is a vital popular culture; like deprived ghetto minorities at other times in history the Hoop's inhabitants offer something which their better-endowed neighbours envy and appropriate, through the entertainment industry. This builds on the sense that Lux Roth Chop stands guard over the destinies of the people on the Hoop, keeping those who might otherwise rebel (like Halo) for ever searching for a proffered hand to draw them out into stardom and prosperity. The passages of the Hoop are lined with notices in many languages and scripts (a Gibson touch); the cosmopolitanism of this citadel of the new poor is constantly emphasised, with racial tensions appearing between the Proximen and the humans crowded together. An additional page of information about the Hoop, given as the back cover of an issue of 2000AD, reveals that 70% of the population of the Hoop is female. It wasn't very obvious,to tell the truth, from Ian Gibson's crowd pictures; and it seems inconsistant also with Alan Moore's thesis that the Hoop is subject to strong sexual tensions making it necessary for women to "cover up" as much as possible. Surely the pressure should rather be on men, who would be in demand? Here Alan Moore is trying to carry over too many features of our present social structure - the character of long-term unemployment, its distribution by sex, and the domination of women by men - into the Hoop, in which the predominance of women numerically indicates that support by families is no longer organised as it is now. I never associated Rodice's position as a "squeeze with a bare arm" with the taboo on exposing the feet; the latter struck me as being a cultural oddity rather than a general point about skin exposure; but they do, I admit, go together. However, later on Halo is embarassed about showing her feet when her arms and legs are quite bare - which seems to spoil the declared intention.

This exposes one of the recurrent slipshod features of the Ballad; it is clearly striving to make a number of statements about women's social position, but by failing to define the position of women in the strip at all thoroughly,

Top Left: General Luix Cannibal
Above: Various designs for the troops. Opposite: A young Halo.

the results are open to an excessively wide range of interpretations. I will return to this in discussing Book III.

Book II shifts the centre of attention quite sharply, although once again the role of the media in misdirecting attention is central. Here, whereas the examination of soap operas was one of Brinna's idiosyncrasies in Book I, here Hale adopts them, perhaps because they are a passion with her cabin-mate Toy. This time, rather than showing the concealment of power in the news, we see rather the concealment of personal relationships behind media clichés. The victim this time is Glyph, uncertainly male or female, who is somehow a subliminal person; desperately friendly - to the point of being intrusive, were she in fact noticed at all - she completely escapes recognition. Somehow I think of her as a female, although presumably he might as well be seen as male from a physical point of view. She does, perhaps, represent an extreme version of the subordination of women, although I hesitate to speculate far; on this reading she is the other side of Toy's "muscular feminism". Just as Hale and Toy see their absorption in soap operas - to the exclusion of Glyph, whom they ignore - as a mark of their deep humanity, as the sense of Toy carries of being wronged by men hardens her against the recognition of the more extreme outsider; only Hale observes Glyph at all, or has any interaction with her. That in the end Glyph saves the lives of both Toy and Hale is a rather melodramatic illustration of the final dependency of the dominant upon the dominated. A difficulty with the Book is that (partly because the readers demanded "more action") the whole story is rather soap-operatic.

On the other hand, the other main incident of the Book has a rather different significance. The Tarantulan Emancipation Army links Lux Roth Chop directly with the war effort of Earth in the Tarantula Nebula - incidentally confirming that there is a war on - and makes it clear that even LRC is less powerful than Steersman's Lodge, which rules interstellar trade. This sounds curiously reminiscent of the Spacing Guild in Dune, as Glyph's invisibility recalls The Glamour. Also, it is revealed in the course of the party - which Hale doesn't attend - that the Rat King which Hale has preserved is a potential weapon for use in the Tarantula Nebula. That Hale is not allowed to know this is the only obvious "fix" in the plot, so it draws attention to itself. It is kept behind in order to shake Hale at the end of Book III, which is a bit artificial. That party, at least, is important for showing just how limited Toy's appreciation of affairs is - and, a fortiori, Hale's as well. When the guests on board are discussing politics, she tries to talk about soap operas. This would have been more obviously relevant if Hale had been at the party; another sign that some fudging had taken place.

Visually, the Book is distinctly exotic; we see Hale adapting to life as a scantily-clad hostess (not without reservations, as I have mentioned earlier); apparently curly blondes are in favour, so Hale is transformed into a curly blonde. More remarkably, we get a deeply exciting impression of space. Apart from the "junk clusters", twisted assemblies of metal with tormented curves and angles, quintessentially Ian Gibson, he allows equally sharp and curved regions of space to appear dead white against the blackness. This is hardly a "naturalistic" image; it just adds to the visual dynamism of the background, and contrasts with the sleek, curvilinear shape of the Clara Pandy itself, the "angel machine". This re-appears in the very last panel of Book III, framing the head of Hale, looking outward and onward, as for the third time she goes "out". I don't "understand" it, but it's magnificent; somehow it gives the reaches of space a sense of human scale, making them not a vast dominating presence but rather a field to be traversed and conquered, an occasion for heroism. But maybe that's just me.

Book III is quite different. It is often visually stunning - the pictures of Lobis Leye, like the night-time visions of the petrified trees against the sky, especially so - and in the scenes on Moab it is grotesque. The contrast between the G-suited figures of the soldiers, the SLABs, and the inhabitants is striking; but not less so, perhaps, than the rather pretty statue of Lot's wife which the Moabites have raised, rather

uncharacteristically. Luis Cannibal appears, and turns out to be about 9 feet tall - Ian Gibson is not very careful to keep him in scale, and the difference between his height and (say) Toy's is hard to establish, although he is meant to be much taller.

Its intention is perhaps clearer than that of the other books; it aims to expose the horrors of war, both material and moral. It gains, perhaps, in persuasive power what it loses in penetration. The appeal of war - apart from the possibilities for personal advancement - is to those human qualities which survive at times of maximum stress; courage and loyalty and comradeship. That these qualities are to be valued because they are so hard to abolish - and war tries hard, and often succeeds - is perverse; but for those who wish for moral as well as material security it offers something that peace cannot, with its determined cultivation of more fugitive aspirations and expectations. This is why war is intrinsically more heroic than peace, and why heroism should be sternly discouraged. To show war without heroism, as Moore does, is to misrepresent it; to make it easier to condemn, and yet to miss one of its most central features. It is as necessary to examine the virtues of what is to be denounced as to be wary of the flaws in what is to be encouraged; to do less is to evade the difficulties. Still, the treatment is not without its subtlety; the sight of a young girl sniper shot down, gradually growing older as the patrol moves on, is a powerful reminder that truth is the first casualty in any war. The personal magnetism of Luis Cannibal is another, and the dreadful self-distrust and pursuit of violence which Hale finds when she releases herself from the army is another. Seeing a child through a gun-sight, with the words "I could blow...her little head...right off.", does more than any number of psychiatric reports to show the effects of war on those who engage in it. Life Sentence, with her silences and her abrupt protests against other people, and her eventual suicide, is a casualty. I am personally not convinced by the tone of her conversation in "The Crush", when she tells Hale "See, I understand you, Jones"; this is too direct an attempt to make her explain her feelings and motivation. I would expect her rather

to be silent and to speak, if at all, more obliquely. Luis Cannibal, too, is a casualty; he has fallen in love with war itself, and this alone, with no further pressure, is a kind of disease.

If this Book is clear thematically, it is certainly not so as a narrative; it falls into a chain of fragments, linked only by Halo's sequential involvement in each. This fragmentation is in part expressive - war is like that, it says - but also makes Halo's place init more difficult. She learns many things, but not much about war; at the end it is impossible to predict how well or ill she will react to a return to civilian life. Her last security is stripped from her; just as (at the end of Book II) she found that Rodice wasn't following her - and she seems to have taken Rodice's surname briefly over the years that followed, as recorded in the Prologue to Book III. When she hears that she is being transferred to Warzone 1 she drops Rodice's photograph, her last material link with home, and its frame shatters. At the end of the Book her past has been poisoned; and, as she tells herself, it was all she had left.

Halo finds that Toy's toughness, also, is a self-protection; but she has been too concerned to lean on Toy herself to be able to offer support in turn. She rescues Toy, or tries to, more because she needs Toy's presence than for any other reason. Toy's painful attempt to break through her self-wrought shell fails because Halo doesn't want her on those terms. It is the fault of them both, and yet of neither of them; and one consequence is that Halo - in what surely must be an imaginary and not a real conversation - first recognises that she has fallen in love with the General. This episode,"A Soldier's Things", is one of the best in the series, and impresses me deeply; by contrast the subsequent episodes, except the opening of "Breakfast in the Ruins", seem too easy and slick. It continues the ideas of manipulation and responsibility and role-playing which Alan Moore touched on more briefly (& more artlessly) in his Vigilante story,"Father's Day", this time treated more expansively and with less sense of cluttered emotions and motives. This contains some of him best dialogue, too, as he feels most intensely what his characters are trying to convey to eachother.

Of war itself, though, we see few reflections;some commonplace thoughts in "When they Sound the Last All-Clear", as Her Serenity goes by, and the fears of an inner demon which surfaced earlier when Halo was discharged. Back in "All-Clear" I feel my teeth grate at the declaration "But then, that's Cetaceans. They let themselves feel things more strongly than we do. They're braver." It's incredibly worthy and things, but the smug simplicity of "that's Cetaceans" is an evasion of responsibility, and in any case the problem is hardly one of letting oneself feel things more or less strongly. It's a matter of feeling certain things at all, and according to these feelings their proper importance. It's also a bit awkward, as a comment on a species which has driven the Earth to war by using its own economic weapons in defence of its own interests. This is the worst instance of a change of heart in the writing of a story, or of a stupendous carelessness of construction. The dolphins are guilty too, but this has been forgotten at the end of the story. Or don't you think so? For writing lines like "If you could give conscience a shape, it would look like a dolphin" Alan should be strung up by his thumbs until he promises not to do it again.

All this has been terribly wandering, in search of a point; and it is likely enough that the same would be true, only more so, if the series had continued. The possibility of a new start, of watching each book explore a new age of Halo's life and a new set of circumstances, might have resisted Alan's usual tendency to lose inspiration after solving the main technical problems of a new series; but it would also have invited the same wooliness seen here, the same determination to exhibit a sensibility rather than to say anything. Still, despite its confusions and limitations, it has done something to contribute to the moral awareness and intelligence of the readers of 2000AD (who am I kidding?); and that can't be a bad thing. I'm sorry it's finished.●

NEXUS

by Fiona Jerome

Nexus, it must be said, suffered from an inauspicious start. Unknown artist and writer, black & white magazine format, small (as in imperceptible) company. Looking on the outside we see this. Opening up the B & W offering you would have found a vaguely promising vigilante/SF script, its humour submerged, its characterisation rough-edged. The art was clean, but the inking seemed a little tentative; the design within panels was often poor, along with the handling of extreme angles and viewpoints. It looked,perhaps, as if everything would be okay. As it happened Nexus managed to be rather better than alright.

After 3 black & white issues, the book's success enabled it to change to a full-colour de-lux format. Strong colour and shiny paper, for once, happened to be a great improvement. The first 3 issues wobbled along at a level. After that, improvement was evident in each of the following 6 Capital issues; when First picked up the title they had a book strong on all basic points, its rough edges almost obliterated.

From a basic idea, tried and also noticably trite, Mike Baron & Steve Rude have embroidered a powerful and emotive book. Let me tell you about Nexus' basic strengths.

First it should go down on record that I find Nexus very satisfying. Not only is it pleasurable to observe the sharp technique involved it also produces what Martin Crookall might call that special glowing inside, that feeling of unrational pleasure. And, as good comic books are wont to do, it involves the reader, makes them care about the coloured-in forms edged with black lines. If people ask me what I think comics should be like, I answer, simply, Nexus.

Nexus is not an extreme book: it belongs to mainstream comics. When it makes statements, it makes them to engender interest in the book, not, as in the case of say Swamp Thing, to produce interest in the issues involved. Its handling of the great mysteries of our time are thus rather mercenary, but also they are sufficiently gentle that they don't trouble us beyond the confines of the Nexus universe. Its art style, writing, pacing are quite distinct, but not totally alien to the traditions established by the great Lee/Kirby era at Marvel. If only the average comic had Nexus' strengths, then all would be well with the world.

It is by no means an outstanding work, merely a pleasant one - pencils, inks, words, colour - all are good. Not mindblowingly, but good. It's totally workmanlike, and then something more. There's a sense that while the creators aren't obsessed by the book they're at least concerned enough with it to form it carefully; that they care enough to add the little touches in the background, the little jokes, that make the story that little bit better.

Mike Baron's writing is just quirky enough to bring the storyline above average adventure. The characters state their cases for being remembered in your hearts plainly and directly. They're not fantastically complex, but neither are they ciphers.(In decent comics, after all, there are only 3 types of character - the all out complex set pieces, the good solid slowly-evolving items, and the sort that are walking symbols of ideas and ideals.) Baron usually chooses to tread the middle line. Dave's history, which he tells to Sundra Peale right at the start of the book, could easily have been written in a sentimental fashion - instead it is quietly tragic, but the soft sense of tragedy underlines the earlier Nexus killings which culminate in a jolly reunion with his son, the self-styled vigilante Judah Manahen. It's very much a heartening, back-slapping event, handled so that the happiness of this event is far more memorable than the sorrows in the past history of the characters. A strong positive note is frequently struck. Similiarly in recent issues the storyline concerning Nexus' refutation of his role, his descent into drug dependance and rebirth as an unfeeling

killer concludes with a massive dose of friendship and love as Nexus rescues Sundra - erasing the idea that they are in love as well as simply lovers - sorts out his powers, and celebrates Christmas.

Baron has a particular gift for creating alien races that are fun, but believable. His creations sometimes suffer from being a little too familiar, the Lost in Space syndrome, but generally the amusing reworking of familiar concepts work; less satisfying is some of his general plotting. The earliest issues are very straightforward and mundane, and in general his thematic concerns lack subtlety. In the very first B & W issue for instance, Nexus demonstrates his power, and the basic ambiguity of the vigilante role comes up. To his wife the victim seems a good man; Zieffer, although in many ways objectionable, is one of the few to resist the use of slave heads - disembodied minds used as telekinetic batteries. Of course Nexus doesn't choose who he kills - he dreams of the victims of evil people, and headaches force him into a tank where his missing is sealed. At this early stage there's little indication that he worries about the moral implications of his acts - he's more concerned about being forced to do the killings, about being made to kill; who he's made to kill becomes extraneous.

The more I read Nexus the more the plots become unimportant. There are a number of SF cliches Although Baron rings the changes among the victims - from the dignified suicide of Inga, an old woman in issue 4, to the unknown child gang leader Team Angel in issue 9, to the semi-immortal Russian general, a friend of his father s, in issue 11 - a comic needs more than assassinations to sustain it Fortunately Nexus has more than that to offer. It offers an imposing central character, both visually and thematically, and involves a wide frame of reference. These little allusions, rarely very difficult but involving nonetheless, often help to add dimension to flagging ideas. In other words, although the material is poor, the cutting and stitching are carried off with panache. A number of plot strands are a curious mixture of bungled pacing and saving detail

As far back as issue 3 there are hints of the source of Nexus' power, and mentions of The Dreamer In fact Dave seems to have a strong idea of exactly what it is that "is more corrupt than any cancer? But the plot does not develop (or rather Dave does not choose to act) until Nexus' reticence forces the creature to reveal itself (yawn). Of course there were clues to the mystery of the dreams but many without the advantage of afterthought, are almost imperceptible. The scene in which Horatio fled the ruins on Ylum a twin planet pointed toward an ancient and alien power source, but the idea seemed to be dropped rapidly as Horatio begins to plumb the depths. There are a number of other clues - such as the connection between the twin moons, Alph & Beta, and Horatio's ectoplasmic playmates, or the twin moon symbol that begins to appear on doors & walls - but they are extremely overlookable. So some of the time Baron bungles, and at other times he shines. Sometimes ideas are underplayed, like the sphere of philosophy in the Nexus/Badger crossover issues; to escape the place The Badger, Nexus & Judah have to agree on something; that Nexus finds it easy to manipulate the others into agreement suggests either that they are being handled badly (although sanity may be questionable, intelligence certainly isn't) or that the plotting required overt simplification. Baron does tend to provide a good fight per issue ratio, & devotes long periods of certain issues to prolonged brawls. And spending whole issues in philosophical debate - sedatory philosophical debate - is really not his style

Steve Rude's art also tends towards action and dynamics. His fluid inking style added a majesty to the later issues he inked. As much as Baron's referential input tends towards modern influence - despite forays into Pope & Dostoyevsky - so Rude's visual stylisation owes a lot to the 1980s futuristic look. Visual design is extremely impressive - from the types of T-shirts Nexus wears to the Futurist & futuristic restaurants, concourses and cities. Rude's art is clean and uncluttered, with sweeping lines and expressive faces, both on humanoids and aliens. Under the hand of other inkers it loses a little of its fluidity, but the continued improvement of Rude's pencil & design technique more than compensate. Right from the start, when there was obviously some problems with the artwork, Rude's pictures always created a convincing future milieu, and his deft visual touches add a tremendous strength to the strip as it is today.

In conclusion, it must be noted that Nexus, a glossy, polished product, deserves its shiney format, and, after a little teething trouble (too much red) has been blessed with some of the best & brightest colour I've seen for a long time. It is not a comic that will ever offer magnificent moments, but it is consistantly slick, funny, involving and intriging - it is consistantly good, the small mistakes never enough to ruin even pages and in the long run this may be more important than occasional bursts of excellence. If the average comic was like Nexus, and Nexus was an average comic Isn't that a thought?●

FANZINE

Fantasy Advertiser 96 from Martin Skidmore.

50p £1 for 6 issues

I don't often review FA mainly because I always think everyone reads both Ark and FA. Chris Williams told me the other night that he regards FA and Ark as companion magazines rather than rivals. FA reviews everything in sight in short, precise, opinionated pieces, with the occasional article and interview thrown in. The news is comprehensive though it lacks opinion and comment (which is creeping through.) There are two major problems: comics are a combination of words and pictures and I think it's unfair to ignore the art as much as FA does. More illustration please. The other thing that bothers me is the sometimes elitist attitude towards comics The readers are strung along on a rope of idealism and creativity, and realism and practicality are shoved aside. Are you covering all comics or just the sort of comics that an elite want to see?

I hope that isn't too strong. I admire the organisation of it all, though, and I hope to see it improve in the future.

Jenette Kahn

During DECAC '85 I met and talked to Jenette about her job as publisher and president of DC Comics, and about the comics world in general. An energetic presence, she makes sure that things run smoothly for the creators. If they want to try out new techniques and formats, it's arranged. Jenette also handles the merchandising side of the business, as well as putting forward her view of the comics she's publishing to the editors.

Thank you for your time, Jenette, and I hope you carry on improving the DC line like you have for the past 10 years.

BEST, Paul

Jenette:In 1976 I came to DC as the publisher. 5 years ago I became president as well, and I now feel I have control of the company. The way I arrived at DC was a curious one. When I was 23 I started a magazine called Kids and it was all written and illustrated by children for eachother. It was an extraordinary critical success, written about in newspapers in the States, and I was on talk shows. For all the critical success that it had - it was beloved by the critics, by educators, by parents, and most importantly, by kids - it was an equally large financial disaster. It lost 100,000 Dollars in its first year. But even though I had problems of bankruptcy, publishing was in my blood So I began a second magazine, called Dynamite, which was the most successful children's publication in history, at least in the United States. After that I created a third magazine called Smash. It was while I was doing Smash that Warner Communications, which owns DC, called me up and asked if we could talk. I spoke to Bill Sarnoff, chairman of Warner Publishing, and he asked me what I would do with DC. After two hours I'd created all these baroque structures of what I would do. Back at my offices I got a call from him the next day and he offered me the job of publisher of DC Comics. Even though I really loved doing magazines this was 40 comics a month, foreign rights, licensing, TV, movies. It was over my head, so I had to say yes

Paul:So you had all these ideas for changing DC Comics when you took over. How do you feel you've changed DC in all those years, and do you feel you've been successful?

J:I think there have been a lot of positive changes since I came to DC. Among the most important are the changes in the structure of creator's rights. It seems almost incredible to me now looking back, but when I came to DC there were no contracts for freelancers. You signed away all the rights to your work by endorsing the back of the cheque by which we paid you. So in order to get your money you had to humiliate yourself and sign away all your rights throughout the cosmos in perpetuity. A guarantee of the return of artwork is now part of the structure Previously you sometimes got it back, or it got shredded, but now it's return is assured in writing. We tried very hard to create an atmosphere of generous integrity and bit by bit began to attract people who had been driven away from DC. Prior to my time people like Marv Wolfman had been blacklisted and most of the best talent had gone to Marvel, really by being forced out of DC. So it was important to bring back the talent and the two ways I wanted to do so were by offering creator's more creative freedom, and also participation in all the profits, which seems to me only right and fair. In 1976 that wasn't even conceived of

P.It seems to me that there is a general drift away from Marvel anyway, going into DC and the Independents.

J That's also part of it I respect Marvel, because they've done some important things in comics, but it is a one-person shop, with one point of view, and that isn't an atmosphere that is necessarily conducive to the support of the artistic individual. DC is quite the opposite. We encourage a diversity of styles and genres. I don t think the people who left Marvel for DC thought of it as the lesser of 2 evils, but probably that DC looks like a place where their work would be respected and they would be respect respected. It has taken us a long time but Roy Thomas, Gerry Conway and Marv Wolfman have joined us Not long after that Len Wein and Frank Miller came over. More and more artists and writers have come over from Marvel, and Dick Giordano would seem to me to be the key to our success First we had to create an atmosphere of integrity and fairness, and insure that it would be consistent over time. Then we had to have people who would take that atmosphere and turn it into something really viable in terms of comics That means not just continuing the good comics but innovating as well. That requires personnel, getting writers and artists from Marvel, and bringing up new ones through our industry. The real key was having Dick Giordano coming in to head up the whole line. He really cares about comics. He's a catalyst for creativity and he always brings out the best in people

P When you took over, DC suffered from the DC Implosion, as it came to be known.

J:The DC Explosion was a time when we had a desire to go to more pages, and to bring back the legitimate back-up story that would allow less popular characters to develop. We worked it all out with the printers, changing the books from 32 pages to 40, but we had terrible, terrible sales on the newsstands. Every 6 months we have budget meetings with Warner Communications, and for June of that year the sales projections at that time showed we would have lost one million dollars. So there was a tremendous pressure to cut the number of titles we were publishing. There were lots of pages that had been completed, but never got printed, and copies were circulated around the offices in mock comics as an inside joke.

P:One of the biggest differences between DC and Marvel, is that Marvel have Jim Shooter, who can say yes or no to everything, while DC have the committee where each person has to give their approval. This means that a Marvel project can go ahead straight away, whereas it would take quite a while before anything came to fruition at DC.

J:That's really true. The Marvel point of view certainly encourages a fast and decisive response. That s something we're unfortunately slow on but the plus side of course is that through our multiplicity of views we encourage different things in our products. So we're the kind of company that could produce Ronin, Camelot 3000, Blue Devil and Amethyst and all be part of the DC world of diverse comics.

P:And because of your slowness Marvel bring out Secret Wars before you bring out Crisis, which was announced 5 years ago. You have lost the market because of your slowness, even though you may have the better product in the end. The idea then seems to come from Marvel

J Absolutely, although I must say that with Crisis it wasn t due to a lack of decisiveness. Dick and I said yes to the project as soon as it was conceived 5 years ago, but because of the research to make sure that everything was accurate, and arranging Marv's, Len s and George s schedules it

got hand up. In other cases it does happen, and we seem to come out as the following company rather than the originator. It is really annoying.

F:I was impressed by the way that there was no editorial interference from DC on Nathanial Dusk 2. Will you be doing more comics that have no editorial presence from DC, but just lets the creators show off their work?

J Konin was certainly a case where that happened Frank had a completely free rein in terms of writing and art, and he could edit himself Nonetheless, I think that even the most talented person benefits from another point of view. It depends upon the nature of the editorial relationship. If the editor is a dictator then that certainly is an impediment to the creative process, but an editor can be a sounding board, a point of view, a guide, and he can work as a collaborator. If the editor knows what the creator wants to achieve, then he could show a way in which it could be achieved. Our tendancy now is not to have writer/editors or creator/editors, but every case is different

F You have the power to approve or veto series proposals, and you have a lot of contact with Dick Giordano and Paul Levitz, but do you have any contact with the writers and artists themselves?

J:I don't have the same sort of "hands on" experience that Dick or any of the other editors have. I see proposals and try to convey to the editors my appreciation of the comics I read. I respect the system that we have where Dick is the overseer of the editors, and I try not to upset that system

As a publisher my responsibilities are to the comics, but as president my job covers the areas of licensing, TV, and movies We're making a concerted effort in the movies For Christmas '87 we have a Batman movie premiering, and Superman 4 (with Christopher Reeve) and Plastic Man after that. The Batman movie has been 6 years in development,and it is being directed by Tim Burton He directed the Pewee Herman movie, which hasn't come to England, but it's done extremely well in the States The script, by Tom Mankiewicz, has never had anyone with a passionate desire to make it until now. Tim Burton came to one of our cons, had dinner with our writers and artists, and went around the con meeting dealers, buying Batman comics, and doing lunch with Alan Moore Tim loves and respects the character, and is eager to do the movie

I'm in the background, acting as a sort of executive producer. I make comments on the scripts meet the writer and director and share the DC point of view. This point of view is different for each character and changes over time. The Batman of the 60s that was aired on TV is not the same Batman that DC owns at this point. I don't think there's an overall point of view, just one based on the integrity of each character

F:Who are you accountable to?

J I report directly to Bill Sarnoff, the chairman of Warner Publishing, and he reports directly to the office of the president of Warner Communications. Warner have so many very, very large and profitable divisions that publishing is merely a passing moment, and DC even less so On the other hand we are responsible for the Superman movies, and they have made money for the entire company In more beleagured times, when Warners were hemorrhaging from the collapse of Atari, DC was singled out as being steadily profitable. It was a momentary flash. Now that all of Warners is recovering and doing well DC has gone back to being a not particularly noticed part of the Warners universe. There are the 6-monthly budget meetings but besides that there's no interference, which gives us a large amount of freedom. The Implosion was the only time in my 10 years at DC that we've had any corporate interference, and that was many years ago

There is a corporate atmosphere that DC really participates in, and that is one that encourages creativity. After all, Warners is an entertainment company It depends on creative people to be successful, whether it's movie directors, actors, actresses, screenwriters or a rock and roll act. So it's very easy for DC to give creators a participation in their own creations, which gets more response from the creators

F:What do you think of the Independents?

J:I think they're wonderful for the comicbook industry. Some, like First, have an editorial policy that I respect, and others come up with individual titles that I wish we were publishing. They give the industry more energy. It's important to encourage all forms of expression to challenge the two giants, who can get a bit moribund at times

F Are there any comics you've published that you like but have failed commercially?

J:I'm a Captain Carrot fan. Unfortunately there aren't too many of us. Happily, most of the series I love are commercial successes. I know deep in my heart that The Watchmen will be a success. If it isn't I'll know that everyone else was wrong I've seen the first two issues and it's the best thing I've published in my entire time at DC. It's an astonishing book

F:Presumably you'll look at a book and decide for a launch at a particular time of year.

J:Sure. There are certain launch dates that are better for a book than others. The Summer is our best sales time

F:And I believe the dealers have a Black September.

J:There's a cold, lean Winter too. We wanted to start '86 strongly with The Watchmen, but Dave Gibbons got so involved with the art that it's taking him longer than he thought, so we've put it back to the Summer

F There's been a large movement of British talent to America. Is this because the British creators have a variety of approaches to subjects, while the homegrown talent hasn't?

J:There's a lot of truth in that. One problem with the comicbook industry is that it becomes very inward-looking. At the very beginning the writers and artists had no predecessors to try to emulate, so they looked outside for inspiration. But as comics have developed over the past 50 years, comic writers and artists have tended to look to one another, and what has gone before, for inspiration. We felt that as a result they'd become a little staid. The artists and writers in England had another point of view. Part of this was because they worked weekly and in short chunks. Joe Orlando and Dick Giordano came over and met a number of people, and I came over in '84 to continue the relationship. Also, some of the British have gone over to America to meet editors and fellow collaborators, as well as become faces and personalities as opposed to faceless names in books. We're not trying to make the British creators into American creators because we value the British point of view. Nevertheless, there has to be some sensitivity to what's going on in America.

F:Superman is to be totally revamped isn't he?

J:At the very end of the year John Byrne will be writing and drawing the new Superman. I think we can use the "new" judiciously in this case, as opposed to the New Wonder Woman, which has been done lots of times. John will be supported by Marv Wolfman and Jerry Ordway in Action and Alan Moore writing DC Presents. Superman has become perhaps the most boring character we publish. He's not intrinsically boring - so many people grew up mesmerised by the character, and entered the business because of him. Unfortunately, we do our best work on contempory characters and our worst work on our mainstay characters, Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman, who are far more valuable properties. The main problem for writers approaching these characters is the continuity of over 40 years that they are saddled with. The writers cannot write about a contempory Superman, Batman or Wonder Woman while they are encumbered with all this excess baggage. To allow this continuity to tie us down is to let our major assets waste away, and that's why we've put so much emphasis on the Crisis. Superman is the paragon of all superheroes, and he's the anchor of our company, and we want all the Superman comics to reflect his importance to the industry. Batman, and our second tier characters like Green Lantern and Flash will also be brought up to date

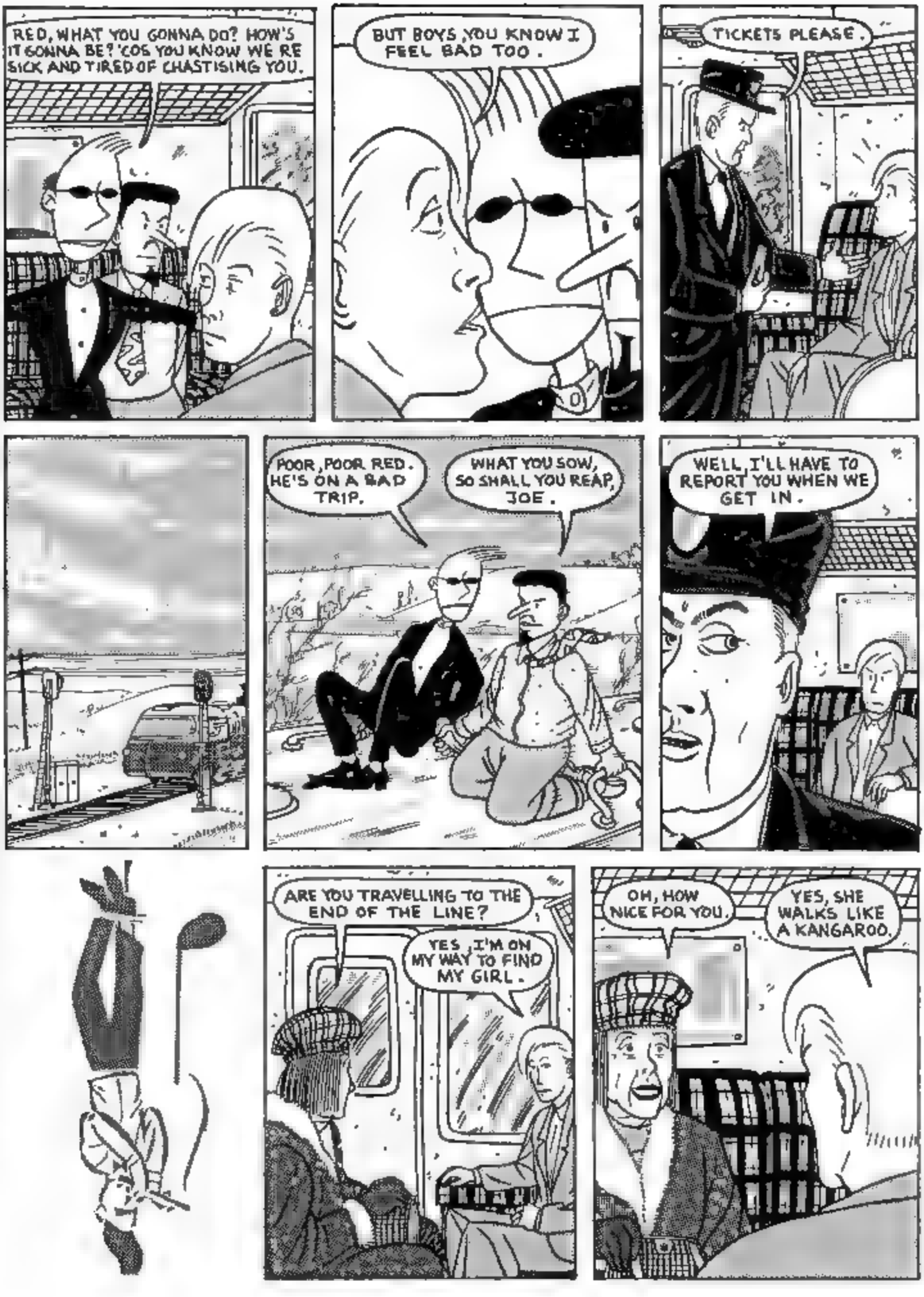
F That seems to be the purpose of the Crisis - to wipe the slate clean. Was this the plan from the beginning 5 years ago?

J:No. Crisis came along just in time for our 50th Anniversary, and so did the plan to make our characters more contempory. It makes us look as though we're intelligent, but it was really all an accident ●

RED'S LUCK.

Phil Elliott 2·86

I DON'T WANT TO DO NO OPERA, DON'T WANT TO HEAR NO SWING NOR SHOUT. PUT ME IN THE ALLEY AND I'LL KNOCK MYSELF OUT.
YOU'RE FINISHED RED
PUT ME IN THE ALLEY AND I WON'T WANT TO LEAVE.
YOUR ARPEGGIO'S FINITO, RED.
GOING DOWN BY THE RIVER WITH A ROPE AND A ROCK. GOING DOWN BY THE RIVER AND JUMP OFF THE DOCK.
OH RED, WISHED HE WAS DEAD.
LOST HIS HEAD AND LANDED IN BED.
MR BREAKMAN LET ME RIDE YOUR TRAIN, I'VE JUST GOT TO SEE MY GIRL AGAIN!
YOU'LL HAVE TO SNEAK ON BOY ..BUT DON'T TELL A SOUL I TOLD YOU SO.


RED, WHAT YOU GONNA DO? HOW'S IT GONNA BE? 'COS YOU KNOW WE RE SICK AND TIRED OF CHASTISING YOU.
BUT BOYS, YOU KNOW I FEEL BAD TOO.
TICKETS PLEASE.
POOR, POOR RED. HE'S ON A BAD TRIP.
WHAT YOU SOW, SO SHALL YOU REAP, JOE.
WELL, I'LL HAVE TO REPORT YOU WHEN WE GET IN.
ARE YOU TRAVELLING TO THE END OF THE LINE?
YES, I'M ON MY WAY TO FIND MY GIRL.
OH, HOW NICE FOR YOU.
YES, SHE WALKS LIKE A KANGAROO.

HOW DID YOU FIND ME?
IT WASN'T SO DIFFICULT.

I DIDN'T HAVE A CHANCE TO SAY GOODBYE - I THOUGHT IT WAS THE LEAST I COULD DO. BESIDE I NEEDED A CHANGE OF SCENERY.

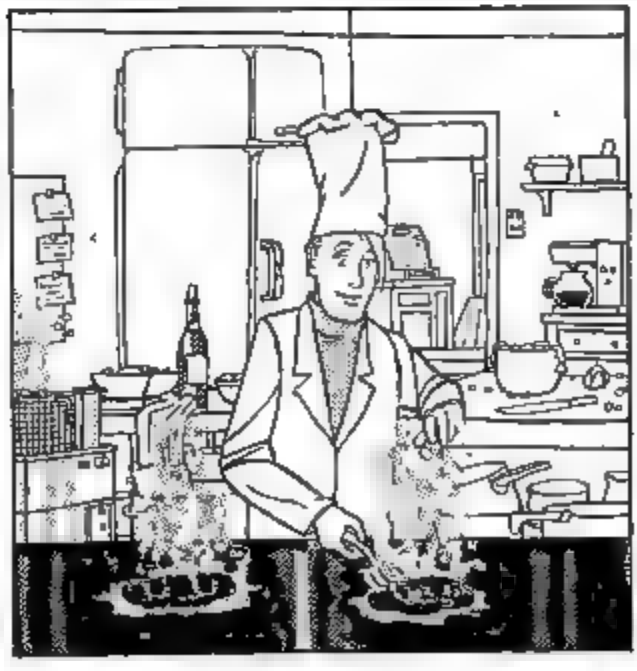
IT WAS NICE OF YOU TO VISIT . . . I'M AFRAID YOU CAN'T STAY LONG . . . I'M, ER, EXPECTING A VISITOR SOON. PERHAPS WE COULD MEET SOMETIME, FOR A DRINK.

SO WHAT YOU GONNA DO?

I'M GONNA BUY ME A RAZOR AND A GUN . . . I'LL CUT HIM IF HE STANDS STILL AND SHOOT HIM IF HE RUNS.

SOUNDS MESSY...
.. YOU SAY YOU'RE A MUSICIAN? I COULD GIVE YOU A JOB YOU KNOW.. IN THE EVENINGS.

WHAT, PLAYING MELANCHOLIC TUNES FOR YOUNG LOVERS .. .. NO THANKS .. I'D RATHER WORK IN THE KITCHEN.



THE Eddie Campbell INTERVIEW

a Labrant product

Eddie is a purveyor of truth, a storyteller of things that really happen. If not in our past, then maybe in our future. These bits of life are documented in "In the Days of the Ace Rock and Roll Club" and "Alec". The latter can be found in albums published by Escape.

Eddie let me question him about his work so far last October, at his house in Brighton. My thanks to Eddie and Anne for their hospitality, and congratulations on the birth of your daughter, Hayley.

My thanks also to Dave Harwood for giving me secret, and no doubt embarassing information on Eddie's past life,

Best, Paul

Eddie: My juvenile period is full of stuff like drawing each weeks episode of the Batman TV show in comic strip form. I did about 15 of these before I lost interest. Something more interesting than that were the 100 oil paintings I did in my 14th and 15th years. I used to go down by the river, and in among the trees, as often as I could Nowadays I regard these as far more important than any of the comics I was reading and drawing at the time

Paul They were all impressionistic. You weren't trying to copy them exactly as they appeared in real life. You were trying to get a represent ation of them

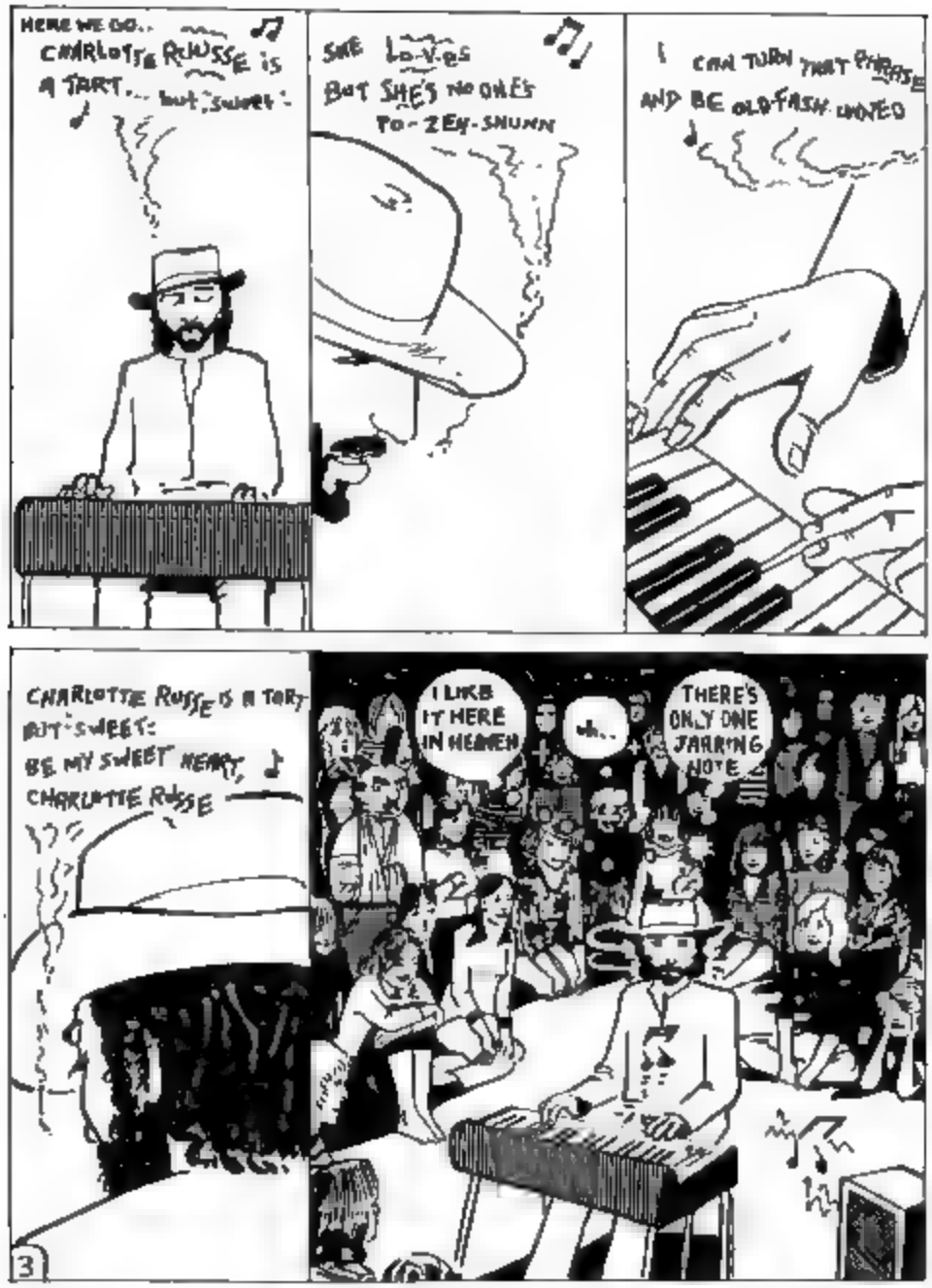
E This is a misconception about "impressionism". The Impressionist painters of the 19th Century, Monet, Renoir, and Pissaro, were interested in being true to the optical sensation. Look, there's a patch of ground out of the window. If you look deep into the shadow of that tree for a few minutes, then the lighter patch of green behind begins to take on interesting properties. It's almost flat. It's a shape. It has a life of its own and an optical sensation. The patch of green is a slice between the dark green of the tree and the grey of the shadow beneath the tree. It's peppered with little flecks of light, which are yellowed leaves catching the sunlight. If I wanted to catch that optical sensation, and be true to it, I would have to work very fast before the sun goes, or I'd lose it. And that's the only reason why impressionism may look to you like a scribble. It demands spontaneity.

A piece I did in 1971, Christmas Story, had a spark of something that later became my Modus Operandi. It was about ordinary people in Glasgow, and, at the time, I treated it as a bit of a joke. It was a retelling of the Scrooge story, where a middle aged man left the office on Christmas Eve, and had forgotten to collect presents for his children, so his wife won't let him in the house. He goes wandering about and meets a blind man dressed up as Santa Claus who takes him to a man who makes toys. The toymaker gives toys to the father, who can now go home, and it all ends with a mystical twist which implies that the toymaker was the real Santa Claus. The story was set in the real world, and the interest to me was that this guy was not a villain. His wife wouldn't let him in not because he was a nasty piece of work, but just because he was absent-minded. It was gently comedy, as opposed to the Mad magazine brand of daft satire.

I got involved in fandom in 1972 and there was one story in that period, In the Desert at Night, that I thought wasn't bad. The letters of comment were noteworthy. One said "I volunteer the opinion that Eddie Campbell has a genuine talent for layouts and telling a story in the graphic form, a talent counter-balanced - to say negated would be too harsh - by the bleak fact that he can't draw for beans." I photocopied that and kept it. This was my first press after-all. Another letter said: "Yet another enigmatic piece from Eddie Campbell. All it was about was a couple of wanderers, quarrelling, having a punch-up with some guards, then coming across the men who stole their horses, and a final departure into the sunset with a few, tortured farewells. I just have to shrug my shoulders and say,'So what?' And those names,Qisk, Grunge, Panse. Sounds as if somebody's puking up." They amused me, so I kept them.

However, fandom was taking itself far too seriously. There didn't seem to be any room for ironies, subtleties of humour. An interesting example of this came up recently in Alan Moore a back-up series in American Flagg! I feel it didn't work, and the reason for that was because the artists were drawing it funny-funny. Alan, I gather, had intended this to be done in a straight style, so the humour would be in the order of irony. Because the characters had been drawn in this humorous style they re saying,"Look at me. I ve got something funny to say", but they're not saying anything funny, and so the irony doesn't work

One of the things about fanzines was that I disliked being at the mercy of nincompoops who print the pages out of order, or who just didn t seem to care, so I decided to do a comic of my own. I hate using the words stripzine or fanzine. That was Deem. It was a 40-page comic I wrote and drew over 1973 and 1974. There's the Angel Gabriel, who, like the Biblical prophecy, has come down to blow his horn on the last day, but in this case he s a jazz trumpeter who needs a back-up band to help play his piece that will signal the end of the world. Once he's got the musicians together they discover that the sheet music is missing a few pages. They can t end the world. Eventually they get involved with the Master of the Perfect Note. Even to this day I still warm to the characters I


HERE WE GO..
CHARLOTTE RUSSE IS A TART... but SWEET
SHE LOVES BUT SHE'S NO ONES PO-ZEN-SHUNN
I CAN TURN THAT PHRASE AND BE OLD-FASHIONED
CHARLOTTE RUSSE IS A TART BUT SWEET:
BE MY SWEET HEART,
CHARLOTTE RUSSE
I LIKE IT HERE IN HEAVEN
oh..
THERE'S ONLY ONE JARRING NOTE
3

Above: Unpublished page from Been.

started the comic in '73 and published it in January of '75, but I was still drawing the characters up until '77 in stories that have never been published. In '81 I revised it a bit. It now stands at 88 pages of which only 40 have been published.

P:Several people helped you like Brian Bolland, your then girlfriend and others

E I had even asked a musician friend of mine to write the music for it - I had put down all the staves on the artwork He didn't turn up with the music so I just added sound effects like 'Zap','plonk-a-dink', and 'BOM-#' for the bass line He did deliver the words of the song and they run all the way through. The panels were layed out in a rhythm so it was quite a complicated little thing. Brian did a little cameo on a couple of panels, where I inked him, and he inked my pencils on the back cover. He also did a couple of panels on an unpublished page.

I met Brian Bolland while I was at the Central School of Art. There was a tutor, Derek Boshier, who was an important name in the English Pop Art movement. He'd been at the Royal College with David Hockney The Pop Art movement was quite interested in cheap popular culture like comics, and Derek had seen me doing these comic related things. He took me up to the attic and introduced me to Brian who was doing a Post-Grad course up there so he was 4 or 5 years ahead of me. I always got the impression that Brian thought I couldn't draw That I was a pretender. Someone who merely aspired. At the time I found Brian's stuff very lifeless. He got his brush-stroke down so right that there was just no electricity in the line. He was getting perfect lines, but not characters. I'd rather see a line that's slightly wild, that's got a rebelliousness about it, rather than a line that's dressed in a pin-stripped suit. The reason I'm getting into this is because in the late 60s, early 70s the primary interest was in how to arrange layout, while now there's more emphasis on the drawn line. If you look at Sienkiewicz it's the line that you notice first. With Biesatta & Totleben it's those big solid parallel lines. Everyone here is imitating Herge for the clarity of the line, the Clear Line. I think Brian's line is much more expressive than it used to be. P He's dirtied it up.

E There's one Judge Dredd page I love where he's drawn Dredd's boots and then scribbled all over them. When Brian followed Mike McMahon on Dredd I think what made Brian's work improve was this internal conflict of line. Much as I admire Mike's line I find him hard to read. I'll go,"Wow, what an artist", but I won't read it. There seems to be a conflict of imagery. On the other hand I always read Bolland because there's a clarity of image that wants to make you know more about what's happening There was a period in the mid-70s when I'd go to a comic shop and see all these meaningless colours on the racks and walk out I didn't read comics for a long time because there was no clarity of image

After I left artschool in '74, I began to be influenced by Brian Bolland I wanted to have the same inkiness, the same precision about the work. I went through a period when I was utterly dominated by the Bolland line and this shows up in the Been work

I did a superhero spoof, and then 3 Sir Edmund the Knight stories under the pseudonym of Roland Bunn He was a medieval knight with a private eye slang, and it got sillier and sillier.

P:Your artstyle completely changes at the end into one we now recognise as yours, and the one you used on "In the Days of the Ace Rock and Roll Club". How did this series come about?

E:I was very interested in a writer called Damon Runyan - the musical Guys and Dolls was based on his work - and he wrote an endless series of short stories with characters that kept popping up: Nicely Nicely Johnson, Nathan Detroit, Harry the Horse and others. I wanted to do a strip about a nucleus of characters, without there being a main character, that would populate an imaginary environment, and within this environment any one of them could pop up again at any given point.

From '77 onwards I was thinking about this. I originally had characters called Icarus, Chortle, and Beertruck, but I abandoned that. Then I decided to do a collection of stories about characters I knew. These characters turned out to be a bunch of Teddy Boys in Southend, where I was living at the time Rockabilly started to come back in around '78 and within a year I did 10 of these stories called "In the Days of the Ace Rock and Roll Club". Not a single one was published until 1982, but I had done them entirely for my own amusement. I had already started the series before the main point of interest

occurred to me. It wasn't the nostalgia, or even why people do things, but why people avoid doing things. Why people avoid getting involved with eachother, and the rituals and games people play to ward eachother off. So "After you, Shadow" is perhaps my favourite of the bunch because of the incredibly complicated situations that these three characters create just to avoid being honest with eachother.

P You were the character Satellite in the strip.

E Yes. I think many young people adopt guises, poses, costumes even, as part of the process of arriving at an understanding of who you are. Some of us never arrive at that, pretending to be one thing or another all our lives, and will be anything but honest with ourselves, which is what these stories were all about. Not that that's a bad thing, it's just that you have to go through that to arrive.

An interesting thing about the series, which ran for 70 pages, was that I had decided not to do close-ups. This arose from a) I felt I couldn't draw them and b) I saw no reason for there to be close-ups. We tend to draw close-ups because we see them on films, and we think that comics are in some way related to films, which they're not.

P The way you made all the panels medium shots gave the whole thing a sort of documentary feel about it.

E It's funny you should mention that because the last one in the series is just a documentary account of things that happened. It's made up entirely of photographs and newspaper cuttings. I'd gone to the extreme of just not being interested in stories anymore. I tried to put in a few lines of narrative development through these by scribbling little things in the margins relating to some of the characters that were mentioned in these cuttings.

P So did you find yourself gradually get disenchanted with storytelling as you got further through the series?

E Yes, though in retrospect the ones that stand out the best are the ones which are just stories, like "Dapper John Minds the Baby".

P It's strange to me that you could draw 70 pages of Ace for your own personal pleasure, and yet not be bothered about getting them printed.

E Yeah. They were totally finished, with Letratone, which means they were designed for printing. In fact I'd reached the stage where the Letratone had become an increasingly absorbing phenomenon. Early on it was just put on to make the page more interesting, but it got more and more absorbing. In "It's me little family, innit?" I hardly used lines, just tones contrasting against tones. It took me months to do because it was so complicated. It's one of the best I've done.

Noel Sickles used greys and tones in a way that just knocked me out when I first saw it. I saw his and Milton Caniff's work in the mid-70s, which I discovered early enough for it to influence me. When I pick those sort of things up I digest it and then apply it to my work. Another influence is Gary Trudeau of Doonesbury who uses repeated images for conversations. It's witty conversation, very sharp. I think about the dialogue I write. I also like Leonard Starr's On Stage, Rube Goldberg, George Herriman and Al

THIS PLACE IS QUIETER'N SUNDAY MORNING
IT GIVES ME THE CREEPIN' WILLIES
I'LL TELL YOU STRAIGHT AWAY, KNIGHT..
..I GOT YOU FREE TO KILL MORGLE-ROBERT.
AND I'LL PAY YOU WELL FOR IT.
WHO OR WHAT IS MORGLE-ROBERT.
'A' SPIDER
Y'MEAN EVERYONE'S TAKEN THE WIND ALL ON ACCOUNT OF A SPIDER?
4

Above: Unpublished page from Sir Edmund's third story, Mad Harriet. Notice the Solland influence. ('77)

Williamson.

There's always a conflict on my pages between line and tone. I'm always searching for the perfect line. There's also a conflict between photographic images and cartoon images. I don't see any reason why the two shouldn't be combined, because when you tell a funny story you tell it in a different tone of voice with different mannerisms than if you're telling a serious story. As well as the styles being mixed between stories I don't see why they shouldn't be mixed between pages or even within pages.

I did one Ace story in water colour, in an impressionistic style. It had a kind of kinetic energy. The fact that things are out of focus gives it a sort of reality. When you're in a situation where everything's happening at once you only focus on one thing, and the rest is out of focus.

P In the second Alec book, Love and Beerglasses, there's a story where Alec gets involved in a fight at Gator's. There's one panel where you see the side of Alec's face and a blurred image of something happening. It's exactly what I see through the sides of my glasses.

E That's exactly what it was. You're getting very near to the impressionistic idea, so I'm drawing it very true to the optical reality.

P I sometimes find I don't want to know about what is being focussed upon but I want to know more about the background detail.

E But that's another problem. When a man tells you a story he brings to your attention certain details and leaves out the things that aren't important to him. On another occasion he may tell the story and emphasize different aspects of the situation. That's the normal subjective process

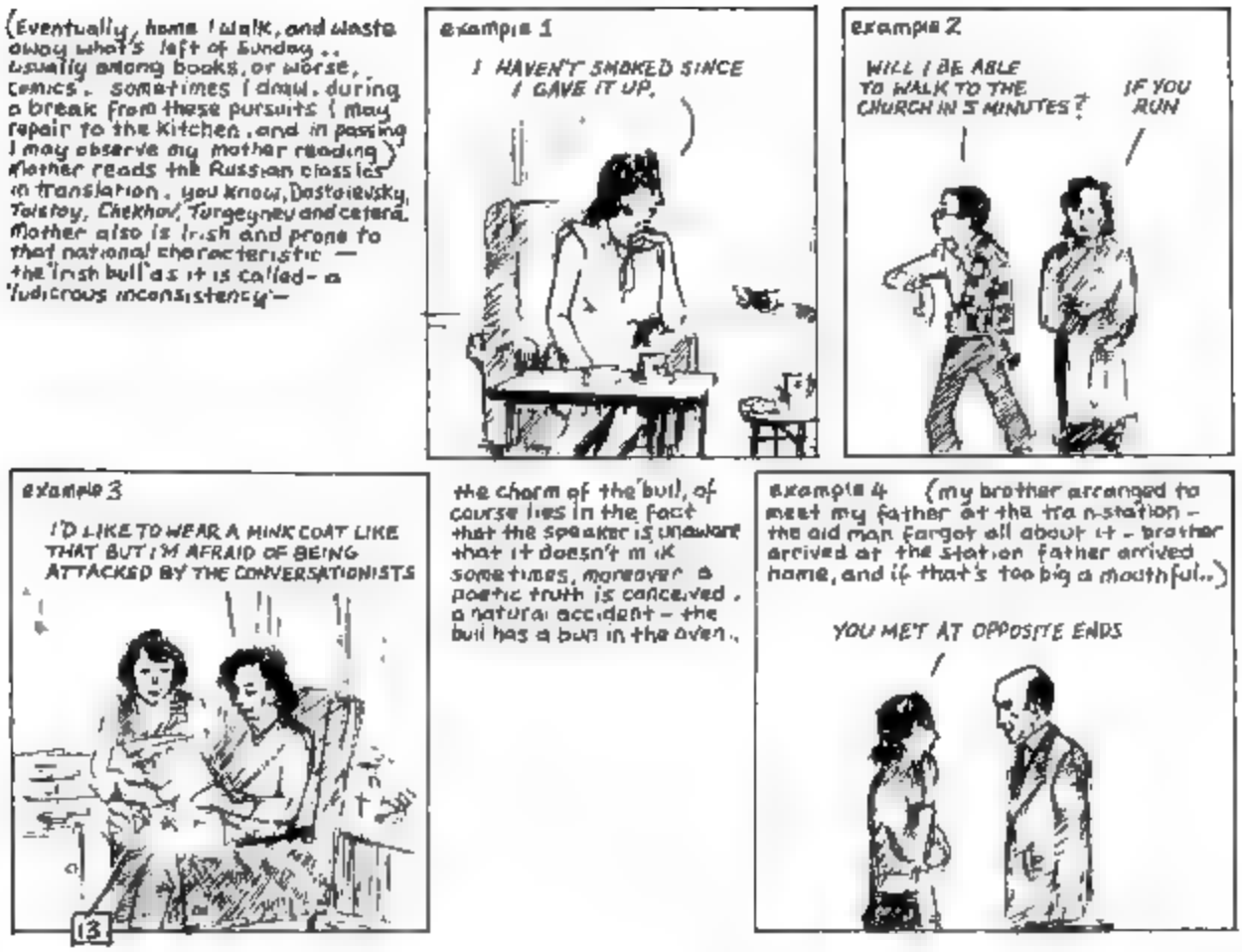
'OWCOME WE GOT THIS ROOM SO EASILY?
CHARLIE'S ME OLD MAN'S BEST MATE - SINCE THEY DID NATIONAL SERVICE TOGEVVER TWENNY-FIVE YEARS AGO
ME OLD MAN'S SUCH A REGULAR AFTER HOURS CUSTOMER, CHARLIE KEEPS THIS ROOM FOR 'IM.
WELL I'VE 'AD IT- I'M CHUCKIN' IT IN FOR THE NIGHT. YOU SUIT YOURSELF.
I COULD SCORE 'ERE
I GOT 'ER 'ERE
PRETENSES,

Above: A page from "It's me little Family comic." which utilises tone to great effect. (Feb. '79)

of telling a story.
F:You often focus on one person in your stories, with the rest of the group out of focus. You could then focus on another person in the next story.
E:What you're saying is very interesting because different things happen at different times. Instead of writing in a chronological order in the next Alec book I've written a meeting of Alec and Penny at a hat party in the King Canute, but there was something happening on the same day that was out of focus, so I've written about Holly and Dave and followed that narrative thread 3 pages later even though it's out of sequence
F:So what you've done is,instead of having one story with all the characters interweaving, you've seperated the 2 stories and recounted them on their own.
E Rather than feel restrained to the normal strictly chronological narrative I've just gone back and said,"Oh, I forgot to say..." We've lumbered ourselves with this cinematic idea of chronological narrative flow, instead of the most natural way of telling a story which is by word of mouth. That's what I'm trying to do.
F:You moved on to do Cliff the Moon Man, with Dave Harwood
E I knew Dave from college, because he was a friend of Brian's Dave had moved to Southend in '78 and we had Cliff printed in Martin Lock's BEM. It caused a bit of controversy because of a nude scene in it. How do you feel about nudity? There's a funny sort of attitude developing towards it at the moment. It's largely a confusion developing from the feminist movement. There are many intelligent feminists around who don't confuse the issue, but what I find is that there's a lot of male sympathisers who utterly confuse the situation. A lot of stuff which isn't sexist is called sexist because there's nudity in it. There's a lot of sex and nudity in Ace but I would argue that they're not sexist. In Speakeasy there was a big discussion about this and a girl came up with a superb argument when she said pornography wasn't about sex it was about power. I thought that was the key to understanding the argument against pornography. The images are used in a game of oneupmanship, where women are the losers. But the idea that all pictures of nude women are sexist is a misleading argument
F:You did a bit of material for Conqueror, some of it with Dave
E:I did all that in '80 in order to get something in print. It was interesting to do and I found it a challenge to do my own little pieces within the Conqueror universe
I'm not too sure how Conqueror has gone now. When it started there was a charm about it. I wrote a review of Conqueror recently which never got published. In the review I described it as spaceopera in a medieval garden of Eden ' It had that archaic quality, but

Above: Cover to Flick 5, with real dragonfly wings.

now they've tried to introduce humans, and it's got a bit heavy-handed and cliched.
F:Would you work with anyone else?
E:I usually visualise what I want and I have something to say. Jams are usually done on days when you've got nothing to say. To me comics have always been a social thing where people worked together in a common language. It has always surprised me that the language of comics, although it's not taught in schools, is picked up by diverse people around the world. I've got a jam here with Glenn Dakin, Trevs Phoenix, Steve Bissette and me, and it's a social thing like having a drink together. This thing hangs on my wall and visitors add to it - Phil Elliott's just done a bit.
On the subject of jams, I had the opportunity to do some Alecs for the NME Glenn was visiting me that weekend and I had to come up with them very quickly, so he helped me out. The NME printed the following:"One of the most original artists working in the comic strip medium, Eddie Campbell's skill is that of the bar-room raconteur who can happily let the point of the tale slip away, so intriging is the manner of his telling it. If his quirky line-drawings seem primitive at first they soon establish a charm of their own." They said all that and the strip they printed beside it was entirely Glenn's. We both thought it was funny.
F:After you worked with Dave on Conqueror, you produced Flick with him for the British Amateur Press Alliance.
E:Since I had no audience at the time it struck me that Dave had a potential audience in this organised group of fans who made their own magazines and swapped them. So I started printing Alec in our zine. This was May '81. Frank Miller


(Eventually, home I walk, and waste away what's left of Sunday.. usually among books, or worse, comics. sometimes I draw. during a break from these pursuits I may repair to the kitchen, and in passing I may observe my mother reading) Mother reads the Russian classics in translation. you know, Dostoievsky, Tolstoy, Chekhov, Turgeyney and cetera. Mother also is Irish and prone to that national characteristic — the Irish bull as it is called- a 'ludicrous inconsistency'—
example 1
I HAVEN'T SMOKED SINCE I GAVE IT UP.
example 2
WILL I BE ABLE TO WALK TO THE CHURCH IN 5 MINUTES?
IF YOU RUN
example 3
I'D LIKE TO WEAR A MINK COAT LIKE THAT BUT I'M AFRAID OF BEING ATTACKED BY THE CONVERSATIONISTS
13
the charm of the bull, of course lies in the fact that the speaker is unaware that it doesn't make sometimes, moreover a poetic truth is conceived. a natural accident – the bull has a bun in the oven.
example 4 (my brother arranged to meet my father at the train-station – the old man forgot all about it – brother arrived at the station father arrived home, and if that's too big a mouthful..)
YOU MET AT OPPOSITE ENDS

started this way so it s not as stupid as it sounds I was confident that there was an audience for it, but I didn t think this d be the audience I didn t think that comic fans would want to read this but as it turns out that s who's reading it

On my invitation Phil Elliott did a 2-pager called Tonight for Flick 5 after I had seen his work on the Fast Fiction table. Then Phil invited me to do some work for Fast Fiction magazine, and we got that. Dave felt some confusion about whether he was part of this or not. He hesitates to be involved, but he fitted in perfectly with his surreal covers and vignettes, which I adore.

F:I like them too. I don't know why he doesn't do more.

E Me too

F:You also teamed up with Dave for those obscure Georgette tales.

E Every Georgette had a point to it. It was just so subtle that it may have been hard to pick it up, and once or twice I guess we muffed it.

F:When people read a strip they expect it to have a punchline, or for the point to be of enormous importance.

E Does a painting have to have a point? It can be the observation of a figure in movement. Georgette was an observation of the style of behaviour of a person I think the first two Dave did were masterpieces, the best work he's ever done. The one I did that appeared on the back of Arhen Sword 11 was just an observation between still life and a figure in movement. It was such a subtle point that I don't think I conveyed it as well as I could have. There's a couple of frames I'm really pleased with. If I haven't got a pose in my pile of photographs then either Anne or I will pose for it. I think it's always important to draw from real life

F:Before you started Alec there was an illustrated diary called Drinking which was about the King Canute.

E I first regarded it as a diary because it was so personal, but it's very formal with the characters being introduced and so on. A lot of the pictures in it were later redrawn for Alec. It had a lot of text, and this was lettered neatly, so again I d prepared it for printing. The whole thing had no form, and I didn t know where it was leading. It was just one account after another.

F:But it does get more and more like a comic strip near the end

E:It got more and more like Alec, but just a different page size. That was December '79 to June '80. At the end of 1980 I decided to approach the whole thing in a different way, which were the Penny Moore strips. Originally the series was going to be called A Pocketful of Sticky Pennies, and there was this Alec MacGarry character who was like me, but without the glasses, I abandoned it after I did 5 stories. Some of them were used later, like Hay Fever and the one about the old woman in book one of Alec. In the second book the guys talking about the States of America is exactly the same except for the last page. And the fight at Gator's was from the first story, Penny Change.

F Why did you reject these?

E The real reason was because I decided not to do them chronologically. Drinking was done strictly chronologically and I realised it was going to take me a million years to get where I wanted with it. Then with Penny Change I got straight into the action and I was drawing exciting things straight away. Then I thought I wasn't being terribly honest with the relationships here. I was making Alec look very heroic, and I was drawing things that didn't actually happen in order to make it a short story, with a bit of action and a punch ending. I was misrepresenting the situation and I felt I didn't have to do that to make the stories interesting So I scrapped all that and decided to start again and find something interesting in what had happened I left all that for a few months while I revised Beem and in the middle of '81 I drew Danny Grey Never Forgave Himself which, for me, was a real breakthrough. I managed to combine little action things – remember the giant goose? I managed to do that without disrupting the realism of the story. I'd arrived at the perfect idea of doing visual metaphors and it worked out just right. It's all right to use a fiction like that as long as it doesn't mislead

F What period of your life does Alec actually cover?

E A period of observations and insights I had between '79 and 80. It was a period where I was more physically involved in things. I live a more mental life now, where I think a lot and talk too much My sensations of the real world, the grass and the trees and the concrete aren t as sharp as they were

F The format of the Alec pages is 9 panels a page. How did you arrive at this?

E The shape of a comic book page is very vertical, whereas a comic goes from left to right. I ve always thought that was difficult on an American comic book page. Frank Miller got over the problem by just going from top to bottom using horizontal panels. He doesn't

K'LL YOU
FOR CHRISTSAKE GET OUT OF HERE PENNY
EXIT
CAN'T GET TO THE DOOR - HAVE TO BE THE BALCONY -
OHH
SCRAPE
AA HH H
WOOF
ALEC MacGARRY IS A PATIENT GUY
SORRY I'M LATE, ALEC
SKOL
5'O.K. DRINK, HEN?
PINT OF LAGER
ALEC NOTICES SHE DRINKS LAGER LIKE A SQUIRREL MIGHT DRINK LAGER - THEN HE NOTICES THE SKID-MARKS
WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO YOUR WRISTS?

Opposite: A page from Drinking, drawn in pencil.
Above The second page from Penny Change, the first strip of the aborted series This is the first appearance of Alec McGarry, originally drawn without the glasses. (Oct, '80)

WHAT HAVE YOU GOT THERE?
THIS IS A LITTLE OF WHAT MY FATHER WOULD CALL 'EDUCATED DRINKING
What?
YOU KNOW. KNOWING THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HOCK AND MOSELLE AND ALL THAT. CYRIL RAY, NOTED WINE COLUMNIST IN PUNCH MAGAZINE SUGGESTED THIS BE TAKEN WITH A POST-PRANDIAL PEACH..
..AND IN THE COMPANY OF A BEAUTIFUL LADY..SHE GAVE ME YOUR ADDRESS
WHAT ABOUT THE PEACH?
HE TOLD ME TO FIND MY OWN
WILL IT GO WITH CHICKEN, THEN?
RHODE ISLAND RED?
OH FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE!
MFF

Above: Dialogue from the Penny Moore series that Eddie is fond of. Cut out when put into Alec. (Nov. '80)

---

even attempt to go from left to right. That's why he has those big white spaces. He sussed out the problem, and he came up with a solution and it works for him. 2000AD is a little bit better because it's a little squarer. I wanted a more squat page size so I worked it out very scientifically. Ideally a picture space should be square. If you divide the page into 6 you get 6 squares like Kirby used to do. But I wanted to get more information onto a page, with more complex stories, so I put 9 panels on a page. The sensible upper limit for the words is one third of the whole space, leaving two thirds for the pictures. So in order to arrive at a square picture I can only allow myself 6 lines of dialogue. Any more dialogue and I have a scrawny picture which I avoid at all costs. This allows me to have movement from left to right. The page is squarer and so has spaces at the top and bottom. I once did a thing called Flypaper, which was a 10 foot long single strip. I cut A4 pages lengthwise and taped them together at the edges. It annoys me that people just pick up an A3 page and start drawing without any thought to the logical shape that any panel or page should be.

Dez Skinn was complaining about 2000AD having an awkwardly shaped page for the Eagle reprints. I don't see why they bother to cut up the artwork to fill up the spaces top and bottom. Why don't they just leave white spaces? Miller does it. Or they could fill in space with a logo or something. I hate to see artwork cut up like that.

F:You seem to be using a subtle visual language, while everyone else uses a dramatic visual language

E What has happened is that because comic books have normally been about melodrama a language of melodrama has evolved. Some of these artists now - they might as well draw villains with black top hats and moustaches for all the subtlety they're getting into the drawings

F At what stage did you realise you were using your own subtle visual language?

E Fairly early on. I was getting very self-conscious about the way I was doing it. In Escape 6 the Alec story had car crashes at the beginning, and at the end, when Alec is told that Penny Moore had been badly hurt in a car crash, he stiffens. I wanted to create this sense of resonance. You don't see the crucial event but I've tried to make you shudder at the thought of it. Implication is the important thing. I've done a story called The Pyjama Girl, which is about a famous Australian murder. A girl was murdered in Sydney, but nobody could identify the body so they kept the body in preserving fluids for 10 years. She became a tourist attraction. I've used a rag doll to represent the body, and as the story progresses the rag doll starts to lose arms, and tufts of hair fall out. I think using the doll as a metaphor really works and I'm pleased with it. I wanted to create a psychological disturbance instead of just horror. I think those Pacific comics were just gross. There wasn't enough to involve you. There's no sense of real horror to it because it's a caricature of horror

F:Implication is used in Swamp Thing and you have to work things out for yourself.

E It's also got a great sense of humour to it, like the end of the voodoo story where the dead guy takes the job in the cinema booth. The idea that there's still dead guys walking around after the story, and yet it ends on a funny note. That's very clever stuff.

F:In Alec you started to use close-ups, unlike in Ace.

E:I'd gotten around to knowing why I want to use close-ups. They are a terrible cliche in comics. We're dominated by them. I don't understand why the artists use it, and I suspect they don't either.

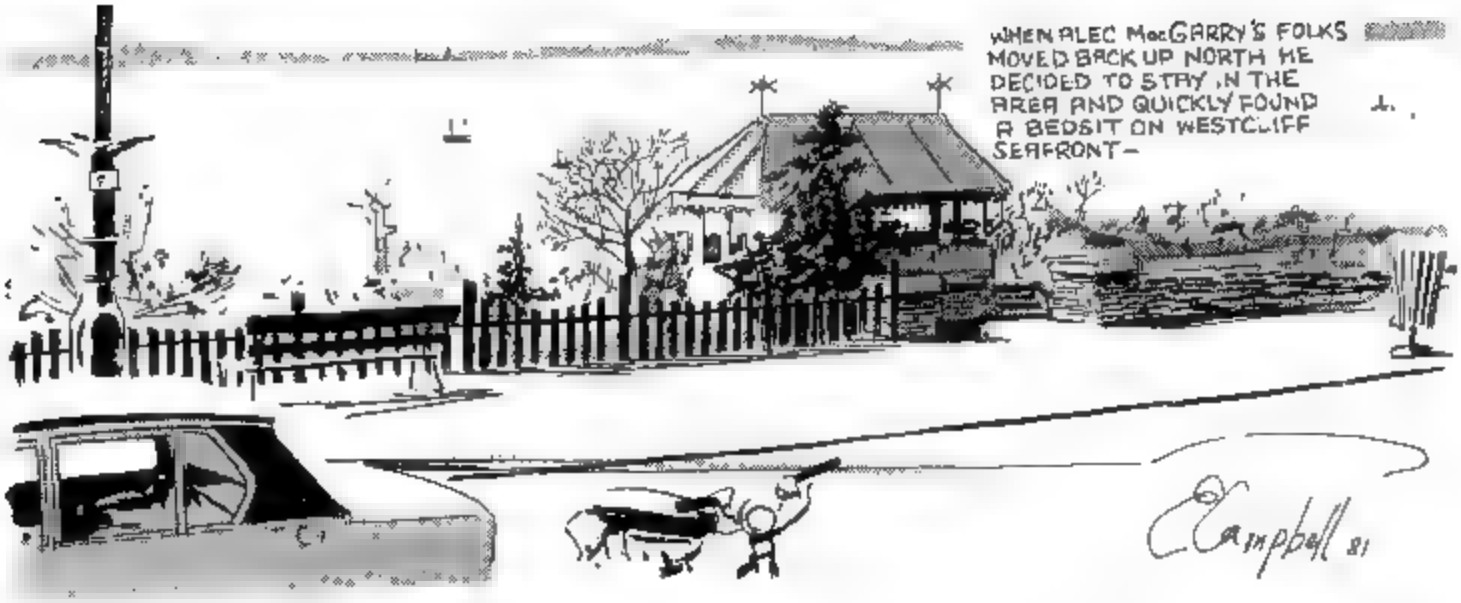
F:Why do you use them?

E:To bring an introspective angle to something that has just been said in the frame. Because I do it so rarely it makes you stop for a minute and wonder what this guy's thinking

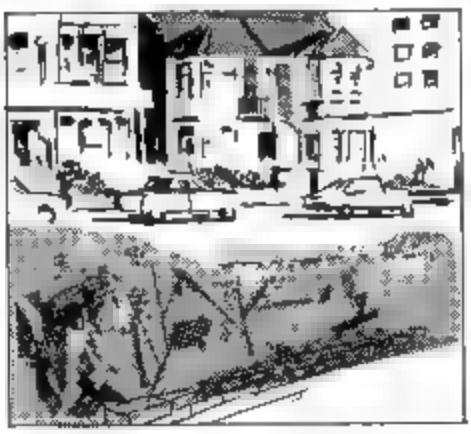
There was a remarkable use of close-up in Swamp Thing 44, Bogeyman, when everytime a number was mentioned a close-up of the eyes of a murdered person appears. That had an effect. On the other hand one of the fill-in artists, Stan Woch, did the previous issue full of up-angle shots and down-angle shots, and panels that interweaved like wedges of cheese. It's a visual language that's utterly meaningless in the circumstances. It was a weak art job. You can never get Alan Moore to admit that an artjob was weak. Alan is always pleased that a guy has put his all into it

F:I think that a lot of people copy a device in a story without knowing why it works.

E:Yes. They graft it on without letting it grow


WHEN ALEC MacGARRY'S FOLKS MOVED BACK UP NORTH HE DECIDED TO STAY ,N THE AREA AND QUICKLY FOUND A BEDSIT ON WESTCLIFF SEAFRONT-
Campbell 81

(SAME WEEKEND AS THE DAFT JANUARY FLIGHT TO PARIS I MENTIONED BEFORE) THE LAND-LADY HAD ADVERTISED FOR A BUSINESSMAN TYPE AND WASN'T TOO SURE ABOUT MacG AT FIRST



THE PREVIOUS TENANT HAD APPARENTLY 'DONE A BUNK', AMONG OTHER THINGS, BECAUSE ALEC MET ALL HIS NEW NEIGHBOURS AT ONCE OF A SATURDAY MORNING

..WHEN ALL TEN BELLS ,N THE HOUSE WERE RUNG BY A POLICE-MAN AND THE POSTMAN (WITH MacGARRY'S NEW POSTOFFICE ACCOUNT BOOK- ALL OF TWENTY QUID IN IT-)

A LAURELANDHARDY SCENE WHICH PRODUCED ONE LONG TERM FRIEND - MALCOLM -

, STANDING CONFUSED IN THE DOORWAY LOOKING LIKE NOEL-COWARD OR SOMETHING-,

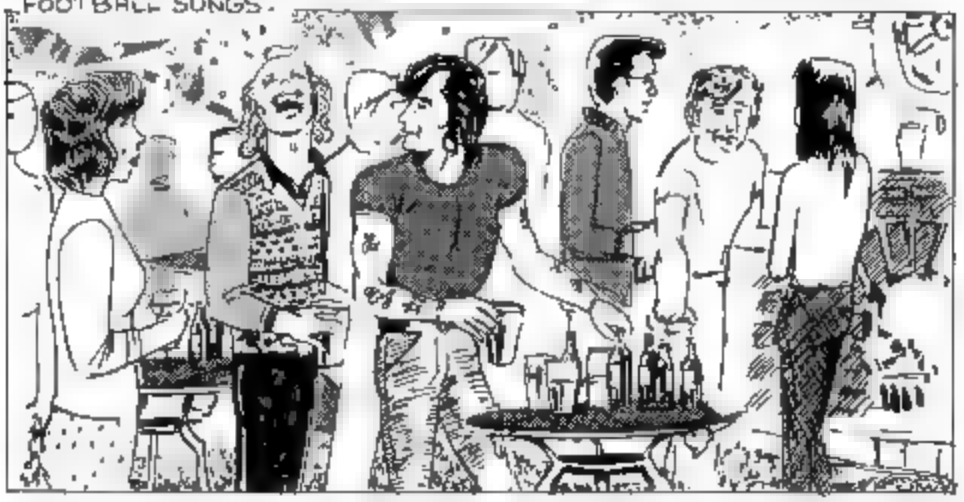
..A CHAPPIE WHO WRITES POETRY- (AND NEXT DAY MOST OF THE TENANTS GOT OUT AND PUT THEIR NAMES UNDER THEIR BELLS)

Above: "John Godfrey", the 7th episode of Alec. One of Eddie's favourite pages because of its atmosphere. (Oct. '81)

BR NG ON THE BEER
THERE HAS TO BE BEER
DON'T WORRY IT'S HERE

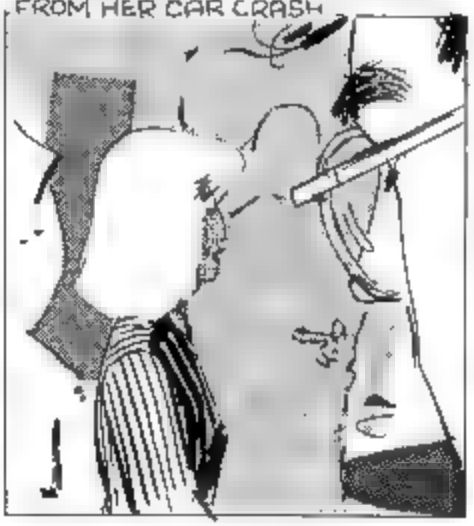
E Campbell

March Nnth, Friday. DANNY GREY'S BIRTHDAY — MONICA WAS THERE, JOHN AND JEN GODFREY.. ALEC (ME) AND LEN WAITE'S BROTHER GEORGE, WHOM I HADN'T MET BEFORE, WAS SING NG FOOTBALL SONGS.



THEN JENS AUNT LUCY AND UNCLE D CK COME IN WITH THEIR DAUGHTER ANGELINE — —

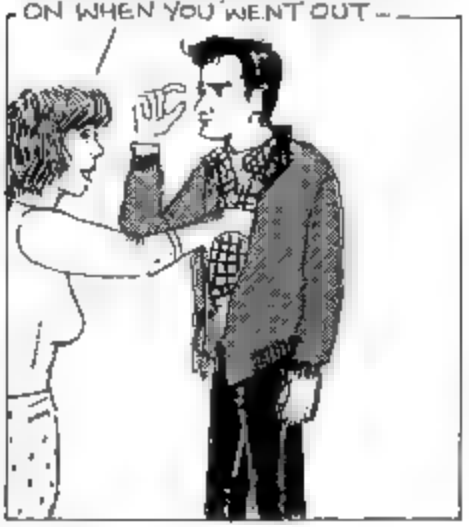
AND WELL, POOR LITTLE PENNY MOORE ST LL WITH HURT FACE FROM HER CAR CRASH



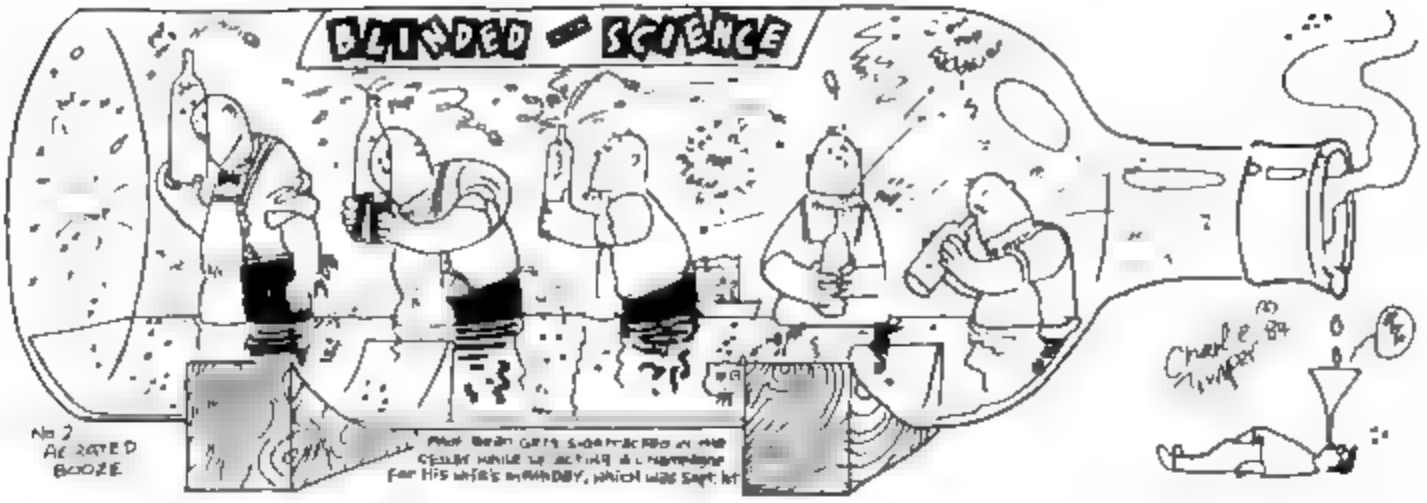
AND CARRY-OUT BEER WITH HAMBURGERS IN THE GODFREYS' CARAVAN — GEORGE ARRIVES WITH BIG BIG BAG OF CHIPS

AND SWEET SWEET PENNY PENNY WHOSE ATTENTION, CAN'T QUITE CATCH CATCH —

COME ON ALEC, YOU HAD THEM ON WHEN YOU WENT OUT — —



Above: From episode 14 of Alec, "Bring on the Beer."
(May '83)



This page: Strips for Sounds. Rodney is drawn by Phil Elliott.

organically from a story. Organic: that's an important word we should think about. To me a story should be organic. Everything should grow from a central core. My ambition with Alec was to do a sustained piece of work that would go on for hundreds of pages, be in the same artstyle, and would sustain interest over a long, long period. At the moment I've finished 37 episodes and lettered a few more. The first thing I always do on a page is the lettering. There's times I lose interest in Alec but because I've invested so much time in it I tend to go on. There's a definite shape to it. I m not rambling. It s a story of relationships among 3 or 4 characters. I'll bring a book out about May/June of each year. The latest one will have a very strong sexual theme to it. The whole thing ends with a piece of extravagant violence, but by then you'll feel that the violence means something. No-one gets scarred for life or anything, but it does have a definite climax in Book 4.

P:To be honest it's very disjointed to me. We know a few of the characters, Alec, Danny, and Penny, but everyone else comes and goes and we forget who they are. There seems to be a lot more going on that we're not being told about.

E:I deliberately wanted to create that effect. It s a big world, and when you meet people in real life and they say something, you say to yourself,"I'll learn more about that later." But you forget. Some writers describe characters and say, for instance, "he had a face like a horse", and so when that character appears later in the book you remember that strange image and hence the character. But real life isn t like that. You meet characters with bland faces, and when you meet again you may forget his name and face. I wanted to create that in the series I sometimes say,"I ll come back to that later" and I never do, but that gives an effect of ripples going out through the universe.

P You've said before in Escape that you d like to go into great detail about everything that goes on around you, but I think that d be boring. You make Alec interesting because of what you select to tell us about.

E:I think there re things I've written that have descended into dullness because I haven't been selective enough, but it's better to have fought and lost, as they say. That's why I redraw so much stuff on the backs of my pages. I sometimes come to illustrate a page and think,"God, that s turgid." I m not going to explain something if the explanation is boring. The worse thing to happen is to bore yourself, so I just leave it out. This gives the impression that I ve left something out of the strip but I d prefer to have the gap than bore the reader.

When I'm putting Alec together I don't think about it being real anymore. I let go of the memory. I don t live in the past. I'm not reminiscing. I just made some observations that I thought were the basis of stories.

P You re not sentimental?

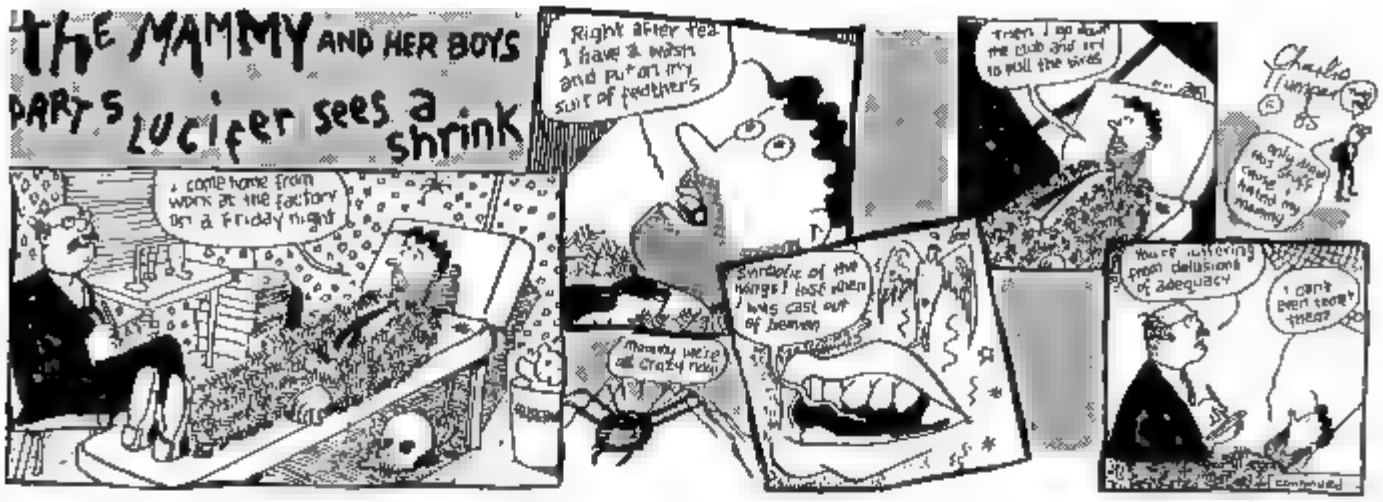
E Not in any way whatsoever, because I'm very happily married to Anne and we've just had a baby girl.

I had hoped that all the work I had been doing over all this time would bring me an income. I put a lot of hopes in a magazine called Fsssst. Because of Beam I had got into some directory of Mal Burns, and so I got a dummy of Fsssst and an invite to the launching party as well as to offer contributions. I looked at the dummy and forgot about it until I heard that Paul Gravett had joined the staff. He d started the Fast Fiction table a few months earlier and seemed to have some sensitivity to comics unlike the rest of the people at Fsssst. I went up to the offices, had a short interview with the managaress, showed her some of my work, and went away. Later I heard on the grapevine that the managaress had been offended by me, and that there was some bad feeling. I figured out later that she had thought some of my work was sexist. The curious thing was that Fsssst were calling me sexist.

P What do you think of Escape?

E:Escape brought a lot of disparate stuff together, and represented them in an attractive format. I clashed with them at the beginning because Paul wanted all-new work. I had a lot of stuff on the selves that hadn't seen print but they still wanted something new, so I did those Boobsa strips quickly. They were unpolished because I couldn't put them away and revise them later like I usually do. Escape is a completely different package now from the way it started in '83 But you know, it s perhaps easy to undervalue the whole small press movement because it is still just that - SMALL - but it's the first real upheaval in this country of Comics as a genuine Art - Art being to

RODNEY: The Premonition II
(THE ASTOUNDING AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF THE MAN WHO WILL BLOW UP THE WORLD IN 1985 !!!)
- I HAVE JUST BLOWN UP THE SHARK WITH ME INSIDE IT - !


THE MAMMY AND HER BOYS
PART 5 Lucifer sees a shrink
I come home from work at the factory on a Friday night
Right after tea I have a wash and put on my suit of feathers
Mammy we're all crazy today!
Symbolic of the things I lost when I was cast out of heaven
Today I go down the club and try to pull the birds
only does this cause I hated my mammy
You're suffering from delusions of adequacy
I can't even touch them!
Charlie Trumper 85

This page: The Mammy by Eddie Campbell

me a thing which is a lively part of life while commenting on life - as opposed to comics as journalism-cartooning or comics as a collecting-hobby or comics as boys power fantasies. Some real talents have been brought to notice in Escape. Elliott,Dakin, Myra, Hughes, Long, to name a handful, all of whom have done authentic and innovative professional work without resorting to crap - now that's a difficult trick to pull off, you know

P When Escape first started it was "The Small Press makes it big" and now it s "These are all the comics in the world " It's more accessible to more people now

E:Yeah. They did have the idea at first that they weren't going to do superheroes, or this, or that. As it s gone on it's amalgamated, and they don t see comics in factions like that. They started off with that silly banner - UKBD. For the same reason I ve always disliked the name stripzine or any word that avoids saying COMIC. I ve always published comics I've never pretended they were stripzines. If I've only printed 200 it doesn t make it any less of a comic than Swamp Thing. The name Small Press came about because we were trying to get away from fandom. We're doing COMICS, not fanzines

A friend of mine took me to a seminar at the Cambridge poetry festival and the subject under discussion was "What is the difference between prose and poetry?" A formal definition was that the end of a line of prose was random, determined by the width of page, the size of typeface, whereas with a poem the writer decides where the end of the line goes. I distrusted this and I found an idea that appealed to me more It was that prose was rooted in the spoken word and poetry was rooted in the sung word. The reason I bring this up is that I disliked the discussion in a recent Fantasy Advertiser about evolving a critical language for comics. Where I feel these arguments go wrong is that they look for a FORMAL definition of comics I feel we can't define comics in formal terms We have to look to their roots. The root of comics I think is someone telling a story and scribbling illustrations in the sand with a stick

P:You once said that your stories are found not made

E It's to do with PLOT. Stories are usually plotted so that connections are made that are not really appropiate. You impose structures that don't appear in real life. Sherlock Holmes has to solve the problem, so Doyle presents the problem to which he knows the solution beforehand, in snippets so that the reader and Sherlock Holmes don't know the answer Then he structures the story in such a way that Holmes finds out in a logical set of steps. That's how a plot is structured, but that doesn t happen in real life. What happens is that someone says something to someone else, and one of them goes to meet someone else and tells him something There may only be a very subtle link between the two things. That may not make a story as such but it s a connection of events that is somehow interesting, and you may derive some meaning from those events. That is a found story rather than one constructed on principles of LOGIC. However I usually do have something to say. The idea of the fight at Gator s was to show the chaos that can be caused around a person, without him getting involved. The point of the next story in Love and Beerglasses was how by one or two things a girl totally enchants Alec. It was an incident I wanted to say something about, but I didn't want to turn it into a story. I have left it as I found it. I have not tried to build it into a structure, but if I didn't have a point I wouldn't want to tell it

P:Would you take that as a definition of your stories: incidents with a point?

E:If you like - it s the basis of mouth to mouth sociable chat

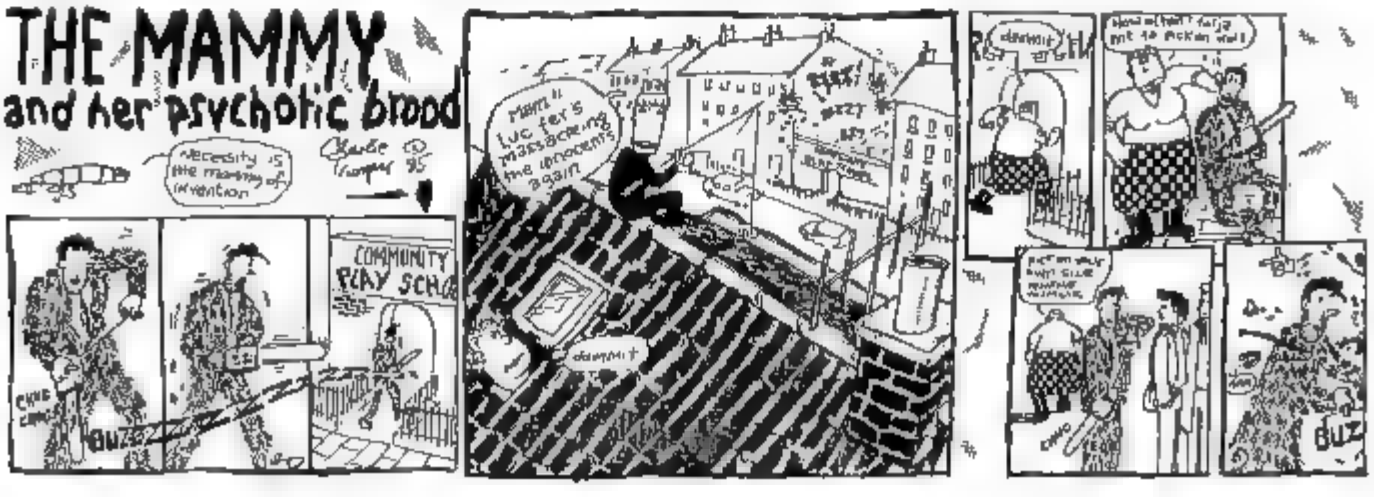
P:When you write do you want to convey a philosophy of life?

E:Someone once said I was a very moral writer, which I didn't understand, because I've never ever written anything where I felt I was implying a way of behaviour which was the one to follow. In the Ace stories I was describing some pretty lousy behaviour. I am just describing behaviour as I have seen it. I'm not saying it is right or wrong, I m just saying that s the way I saw them

P People regard strips as purely a storytelling medium with a moral standpoint, not as the tool of an objective reporter.

E:It's not my part to make judgements, it's the reader's

P:Important issues like Government, sexism, politics, the bomb, the environment, are rarely if ever discussed in your strips or your point of view put forward



Things are getting HAIRY for the MAMMY and her BOYS...
Aw, Mum! Can I watched to stay in tonight an' watch COWBOY
Thank God I'm free of that evil place eh? what was that noise?
AH! That hot breath on my back, on my God -!!
The Mammy won't come in this time

Above: The Mammy as drawn by Phil Elliott.

E I discussed abortion for 3 pages in Love and Beer-glasses but I didn't arrive at an opinion. I think it's a very serious thing to have an opinion. I don't think we should have one unless we seriously think about what we re saying. There s that old saying, "Everyone s entitled to their own opinion", which I disagree with. We say that without thinking about it I have opinions, but only about very few things, which I have thought about very deeply. I think it s irresponsible for me to have opinions just for the sake of attracting attention

P Perhaps you don't know the full story

E That s right Another old saying we must question is, "There are 2 sides to every story." That s not true Sometimes right can only be on one side, Another one is,"You only know someone after you've lived with them" We only say that because we don't like to admit we made a mistake, or we blind ourselves to the truth about somebody. Life is full of little platitudes that should be examined more closely

P What effect did the first Alec album have?

E:I was on Capitol Radio's Artbeat programme, I took part in an art exhibition at a Mayfair gallery where I hung up 5 pages of Alec, and I had a short run of Alec in the NME The Guardian had a review of the Mayfair show and the reviewer started off,"Since the neurotics appropriated the comic strip we have seen a perfect blend of form and content. They have subverted its innocence and filled its thought-bubbles with their wretched guilt-sodden soliloquies. The cartoonist is required to perform the duties of a Catholic priest." He was talking about the confessional. As examples he mentioned Art Spiegelman, and Oscar Zarate's rendition of Shakespeare's Othello. I think that's an interesting idea, and seems to say something about what the New Wave is all about. He was saying that comics were a good medium to put these introspective ideas across

When I went to Australia I used my flight over as the basis of a story with Treva Phoenix that appeared in Knockabout. Travelling Light is one of the few stories I ve done based on recent experiences. While I was over there I did The Pyjama Girl, which was the first comic art I ever sold. I sold it on a tropical beach in North Queensland for 100 Dollars. It was the end of '83, and I d run out of money with 3 weeks to go. Phil Bently, of Inkspots, gave me 100 Dollars for the originals and it got me through. It was more of a favour than a business thing. I drew it on my brother-in-laws dinner table with felt tips, because we were in the tropical backwoods and I couldn t get brushes or tones. I researched the whole thing in books and old newspapers

P:Have you ever thought of doing the same sort of thing again?

E:I have actually. Journalism in comics. That's something I may do in the future.

P:How did the Charlie Trumper thing in Sounds come about?

E When I came back to England I was fired up and determined to make it big I heard from Paul Gravett that a space was coming up in Sounds I had previously tried to get 'Dapper John' and 'Dress Rehearsal' for a Nuclear War into Sounds the year before, when Alan Moore gave up his spot, but with no success. Phil Elliott had just had 'Busby's Rock and Pop Facts' in the Melody Maker for 4 weeks, and we felt that if we got together we had what it would take to get accepted. We got together over a weekend and did 3 samples of Wonders of Science each. Remember I was talking about this social thing? Well, we decided that I would do a couple of weeks and Phil would do a couple, and mix it about a bit. Improvising. We showed them to the editor and he liked Phil s but thought mine were pornographic. We got in anyway. We got away with some amazing things over the 33 weeks and had no editorial interference at all. I did a couple of things that were almost Herriman in their whimsy. We just invented like mad every week. Phil and I are remarkably in tune. Eventually we began to get subtle feedback that Wonders of Science was getting too complex. We decided to can it and start on something else fast. After the changeover the editor said,"I'm glad you did that because some weeks I just didn't understand it."

I decided to do the autobiography of Rodney, the man who would destroy the world in 1985, starting from his birth. It ran for 39 weeks and I wrote it all, and Phil drew it all. During this time the editors had told us to finish the strip because they were going to put something else in it's place. Meanwhile, a survey they conducted showed that the readers liked the strips, so they let us continue. Phil had worked up Gimbley samples and I had done seven samples of The Mammy, since it d be every man for himself after Rodney finished. The Mammy was accepted and my 7 were printed. All the rest are drawn by Phil. The story has a lot of weird characters involved in a very complicated social security scam

P:It looks influenced by the BojeffFries Saga

E Yeah. We wanted to do a psychotic Addams Family for the 80s. It s a deliberate attempt to be crude We ve been working at Sounds for 2 years now and I've set myself the task of wooing the readership. To do this I've got to do something that has to be in tune with a certain section of the modern youth that's growing up in the shadow of CND, and the 1040 card. Something which is nihilistic, shitty, violent, destructive. That's the brief. The daft thing is that it took me so long to understand the brief. Yet, Alan Moore, when he worked there, understood that right away. I admire him for knowing exactly what's necessary at any given point, for any given audience. It's not a quality I have built into me. It s something I have to strive towards. And to try to entertain any audience is a thing worth achieving

P You've just broken into American comics

E:Yes. I've just had word that my Pyjama Girl story is to appear in an anthology-style horror comic to be published later in the year by Dave Sim with mostly Bissette and Totleben artwork Also there's a new mag from Fantagraphics called Honk to appear in June that will have contributions from me. I'm very pleased about these two developments ■

As a footnote to the last bit, Steve Bissette mentions the horror comic in his interview, and as for the Fantagraphics book, Honk, that has a lot of British contributors including Phil Elliott, Ed Pinsent, Glenn Dakin, Treva Phoenix. It reprints Rodney, and it should be out during June

AMERICAN GOTHIC

by
Martin
Crookall

"Growth Patterns" Swamp Thing 37.

Not the Gothic proper, but the prelude to Alan Moore's odyssey of contemporary horrors, which starts next month. For now, we have an essentially passive story of the SwampThing's re-birth, after his death at the hands of Nukeface, which kicks things off with an appropriately heavy dose of intrigue. If your curiosity can get through this unscathed, stick to Dallas.

Whilst Abby tends Swampy during him almost cute re-growth (into a body that at last abandons the legacy of Alec Holland, being free of the once crucial Bio-Restorative formula) Moore builds in brief bursts a new supporting cast, a real bunch of wierdoes, each aware of something coming. Something big, rotten, powerful and heading this way, about a year off but closing. Something that's going to require the stirring of a lot of old belief if it's to work - which means that all the classic frightmeers will be re-appearing to set it going.

As in "Crisis on Infinite Earths" the rationale is put up front, explaining immediately what's going on, shrouded of course in sufficient mystery to preserve the story-telling decencies. This is rather more effective than saving such revelations for the end, when you've often lost your readers amongst too many arbitrary moves and overdose enigmas. Either way, it depends on having a writer strong enough to keep to the designated themes.

There's enigma alright amongst the new cast: one punk, one biker, one stammering epileptic and a nun who looks like Lee Dawson. And John Constantine: some kind of ring leader, English, smart, suide, very much thing a la "Brimstone and Treacle".

And there's a very sick imagination at work here, if only evidenced by the truly revolting nightmare figure of a boy with its head on backwards and one arm sewn into its flesh behind its back. It's on it, don't worry, courtesy of Rick Veitch, filling in here. Rick.

Funnily, what Moore has in mind was done, in less formal fashion, by Wein and Wrightson, back when it all began. Then it was traditional Frankensteins, werewolves and Cthulhu-type demons. I don't doubt that Moore has in mind a different route through the undergrowth - and I shudder to think what's waiting. Satan? Cthulhu? A Black Hole? Tala and her Dark Circle from those old Phantom Stranger's of Wein?

Wild guessing, and far too early. Read and see.

'Still Waters' Swamp Thing 38

It's actually Stan Woch who draws the first part of the real Gothic, though you mightn't realise it, with John Totleben's customary smooth glazed inking, as if everything is seen ever so slightly out of focus and not completely clean. There are rather more artists who can share Alan Moore's twisted vision of the Florida Swamps than you'd normally care to imagine.

After first dying in 36, Swampy dies again - but this time it's just a means of transport. Now that is weird, but probably cheaper than Greyhound. His target is Rosewood, Illinois, and a surprising return to part of Swampy's past continuities. Fambo and Yonkers came this way in no. 3 of the present series, introducing a tribe of punk vampires, and the Matheson-inspired concept of vampirism as a communicable, anaerobic virus. They all died though, when the dam got blasted and the town drowned in running water. Nope, not quite. Not the ones who slept in makeshift air-tight coffins (supermarket freezer cabinets). Once the water stopped running they emerged, to find how easy it was to live underwater, to form a community where man would never notice.

Which raises the question of how John Constantine noticed. This guy has to be the most fascinating character to appear in a mainstream title - two appearances, and he's running the show, and intriguing me to Hell!

Strangely, or not so strangely, not a lot happens. This is a classic example of the exposition issue, of which Moore has written several. So has every other writer with a multi-part story and a big climax. The difference is that Moore doesn't turt things up with fake fights, phoney cliff-hangers and unnecessary climaxes. Instead the facts are presented, distorted Swampy meets Constantine at Rosewood and gets told what got left over from last time.

Little things happen in these pages. A boy at play bitten and drained. A fertilization of eggs borne by a disgustingly bloated woman, ejaculated like a fish. And she's bare-breasted, though there's nothing of titillation here. Like the head-twisted boy, it's an eye-cracking sight.

What and why. All so that next issue (or maybe even the issue after) when the climax comes, it will mean all the more. For now the climax is only a choice. Does Swampy doubt Constantine or does he choose to help? He chooses. And now they're both in over their heads.

Above: Pencils from page 13 of Fish Story.

"Fish Story" Swamp Thing 39

It's something of a shame that, after all the intelligence and effort that went into last issue, the climax and defeat of the Vampires of Rosewood should seem so perfunctory.

Actually, that's a harsh assessment; there's still more intelligence and inspiration gone into this issue than into any five other mainstream titles, but for once - And despite the return of Steve Bissette - things don't seem quite to gel. The opening sequence seeks to establish common ground between the vampires and us (using one of Moore's favourite devices, the narrative that simultaneously applies to two different things) but it fails to come off here because of the hideously alien nature of the vampires. The scientifically justified - and treated - vampires have none of the familiarity of Dracula's ilk and their more extreme divergences (such as the hatching of the eggs and the cannibal banquet that follows) don't lend themselves to sympathy. These creatures are just too unclean to slip into their skulls

By the same token, the fish-monster that results is so improbable a form is too much monster-of-the-deep (a la Lovecraft) and as such is not really the most effectiveterritory for either Bissette or the magazine Swamp Thing and it's artists are at their most painfully effective when their subject is recognisable as being derived from human...once. We've already had the boy-thing and the bloated woman.

Where "Fish Story" seeks to advance furthest is as Swampy develops his capabilities as an Earth Elemental Seated on all fronts in his traditional form the Swamp Thing recognises how limited, how 'human' his concepts remain So he 'becomes' the valley, rips apart the dam in an earthquake, and the running waters destroy the vampires and the fish-monster. Just like that.

That's what I mean by perfunctory. It makes it seem too easy to beat what's been established as one hell of a monster, in its own, ideal environment Just grow another power... No, that's glib and unfair. It's logical. Just a bit too convenient.

The heart of the story for me is in the growing non-relationship of Swampy and Constantine. You blew it, says John, and books the next appointment with the chance-acquaintance of a dentist's receptionist. The man is able to provoke quite unEarth-like emotions in Swampy, and his chortle in the last panel is worth the whole book

And there's that hint in the last panel. Only last month a mate of mine suggested to Moore that Swampy could run more than one body at a time. He got a very funny look for that...

"The Curse" Swamp Thing 48

This would originally have been a 48c taster but the business logistics got in the way, but it's obvious this was planned to be as complete as possible, even as part of the Gothic

"The Curse" has more than one meaning: we're with the werewolf now, and yet the title is also a semi-humourous (and semi-bitter?) euphemism for the female's monthly blood-letting - menstruation. Moore, Bissette and Totleben, working in concert in their startlingly effective fashion, have cross-matched both notions, and produced a truly visceral tale.

Quite what the medical justification for linking lycanthropy with menstruation might be I have no idea, yet the connection has a striking effect upon this male Moore moves effortlessly between the light, carefree relationship of Abby with the Swamp Thing, the blindingly cool observation of the life of Kentucky wife Phoebe (frightening in its simple alien blankness) and the historical fact of the Indian woman, sent to the Red Lodge when that time of the month came - unclean, leper-like, inhuman

The Werewolf is, like Swampy, an elemental force, the fury and ultimately despair of all the women in this place treated in this sick fashion, much as women are, if less blatantly, treated today. It possesses Phoebe, whose home is on the site of the Red Lodge, so that the Wolf within, the fury and despair, leaves her body and becomes entire, and primal

Swampy and the Wolf face off as elementals, the one driven to save, the other to rend. There are two superb matching images of this, at the foot of page 13 and midway down page 18, where Bissette and Totleben come close to leaving comic book art behind in the purity of their detail (thank God this book isn't on newsprint!), and in the end it is enduring Earth that endures and the red wound of the Wolf that tears and demands the only release that there ever is for both of these curses: Death

One or two referrents should be noted, at least in passing; as in many of Risner's Spirit stories, the hero is essentially irrelevant for this is the story of the Wolf, of Phoebe, of Woman And its redefinition is so powerful a fashion of an ancient and mythical fear node is the direction of Angela Carter, whose collection "The Bloody Chamber" redefines fairy-tales, including the one filmed as "The Company of Wolves" - Phoebe's transformation is clearly derived from that film

Heaven knows, I'm not a woman, so I can't properly judge this, yet neither is Alan Moore, and he wrote it. I have often argued that comics are too weak and feeble to be considered myth, yet this story comes closer than any to that area where we transcend our conscious understanding and learn through the symbols that we breathe life into. It's astonishingly powerful: leave it at that

One last point: unlike last issue, I suspect Swampy has managed to contain the 'contamination' being spread There is no carping, only cheeriness from Constantine, and the people saw only a dog, not a Wolf. That too is no doubt a comment. Most of us see only what we think is familiar, and call it harmless. Chew on that.

"Southern Change" Swamp Thing 41

After last months synergistic gem, we return to familiar turf, with the latest manifestation turning up in the Florida Swamps. There's a bump in the night going on here...

Several themes come together here in what is again an exposition issue, though in and amongst the main sequence there's a regular cutting to the Swamp's Odd Couple to under-line the growing tension. We seem at the moment to be with Voodoo, though initially more attention is given to what appears to be a more 'orthodox' kind of possession

'Southern Change' (and what is it with these two word titles?) is the most conventional approach that we've yet met in the Gothic. We're all familiar with the story where innocents re-visit the scene of some old tragedy and are forced to re-enact it by the restless spirits. I first came across that one 22 years ago, in the original 'Eagle' (of blessed memory). Here it's a TV cast, playing soap opera with Southern Belles and slaves: 'Mandingo' meets 'Dynasty' with some chilling side-effects

The triangle of slaver, wife and slave dominate the story, at first possessing the old plantation with their dead voices, and then slowly growing upon and over the actors, Richard, Angela and Billy, who begin by reversing all the roles but are gradually sucked in, transformed, as the air throbs with Southern heat.

Above: Pencils from page 6 of The Curse

It's more than conventional, it's played dead straight by Moore, with no attempt to reinterpret the theme. That's unusual, but then are you sure what that theme is? Despite the spectral cover of Swampy as Voodoo doll, all be-pinned, or the constant reference to dates from the Voodoo calendar, festivals and symbols, what's going on isn't very Voodoo at all, even if, as summer sinks on, the dead begin to possess more than just the principals.

It's difficult to comment since this is all rather incomplete, and too much is laid out too obliquely to judge its effect, other than saying it disturbs. All of that is under the surface; it didn't seem like anything other than a very straightforward script whilst reading it. Good, but plain.

Abby and Swampy talk a lot. It's like their conversations of a half-year ago, which reminds how quickly time flies on this series and how much it changes. Abby has receded into the background a little, but here her part in Swampy's life is re-emphasised, even as Moore reminds us of the deepening gulf between Swamp Thing and humanity as he grows all the more... natural. A paradox, but then Moore's good at that. "Swallowing" the dead bird takes us a giant step away from normality even as it's so logical and natural; no wonder Abby's joke falls so flat.

Alfredo Alcala sits in this issue, on inks, producing a more earthy, hardened look to Bissette's lines. There's less detail, but the solidity is so well in keeping with the story that hopefully he'll ink the second part too. There's a little too much of "Savage Sword" Buscema about faces, but Bissette is too much his own man for it to harm the flow.

Long term readers will be sniffing the air in appreciative recognition of old times, because Wein and Wrightson passed through here on their last issue, 'Swamp Thing' 10, old recession, back in 1974. An old plantation, a cruel master, tortured slaves and ghosts who returned. Familiar but different.

However, we're paying for different glue different so get cracking on it lads!

"Strange Fruit" Swamp Thing 43

I'm finding it very difficult to make up my mind about this one. The horrors are not extreme or clear-cut, or even clearly established. The ending confuses, as does the theme. There is a comedy that undercuts the tension instead of underlining it, particularly in the ending in fact. I'm not sure about this issue, and on that score alone it has to be said that it failed.

We open with some splendid prose from Moore, simple yet subtle and comic, that, ah... animates the rising of the dead, but the danger in that this scene is too strong and it outweighs any later attempt to have us see the risen dead as menaces. A sympathetic homeliness pervades their movements; we are led to understand them and their desire to breathe again (one we can all understand). Their gentleness is further emphasised by the scenes with Alice and her returned father.

Similarly, Abby's pregnancy in the danger scene this time only serves to diminish the tone. There is a genuine frisson as her outlandish confrontation with Uncle Ray/Richard ends with a knife plunged into her stomach. Yet it's only a stage knife, and though she dies a stage death on us, she just gets up and laughs at it. And at us, it seems.

And the knife had been used to 'skin' Billy Carlton, which leads to some very strange games by Moore and Bissette on page 18, as Billy the black actor is cuddled by Angie the white actress who became Charlotte, the white woman who seduced a slave. It's a very unclear page; partly it seems to be valediction, as Angie seems in some way to have undergone an illumination as a result of her experiences, but Bissette alternates between a whole and entire Billy and a skinned William, panel to panel. The barrier between realities is broken, not lowered, and there is no observable point to it.

The climax is the traditional confrontation between the walking dead slaves and the possessed slaver, still stuck in their assigned roles. Swamp Thing intervenes, but only preserves the dramatic unity by being shot; and then his catching fire enables him to burn down the mansion, the roots of this strange fruit (cue Billie Holliday...). Again the drama is undercut by this reminder that it is not the participants who are to blame, that they are merely fruit and that it is the roots that are bad.

It is no more clear whether this really is supposed to be Voodoo, and the movement of the whole story is forever between two stools. Voodoo as such becomes no more than down-home superstition, the laying of salt around the cemetary to prevent the dead from leaving.

Comic from the first and comic to the end: Alice's father lives on and finds a job, selling tickets at a cheap cinema that specialises in tatty horror flicks. In a stronger story that might have made a fine irony but here it just falls flat. The other half of the theme is derived from just that kind of movie, but it is not allowed any impact. Too often is it emphasised that these dead are harmless. Where Moore failed to strike an empathy with the Underwater vampires, here he succeeds too well. The dead are too familiar.

The on-going story isn't doing too well either. Though he gets a mention, Constantine is entirely absent, and without him the feeling begins to grow that we're running off the rails, just 'monster-of-the-month' with no underlying structure. That wonderful promise of 37/38 hasn't come through. This stuff has no connection to the forthcoming Dark Millenium.

Come on chaps.

"Windfall" Swamp Thing 43

A non-series fill-in; the Gothic goes on hold, Swampy turns his back on us on page 1 and shambles out of the book. What we get in an extension of the "Nite of Spring" story, as two others sample one of Swampy's tubers and hallucinate. One dying woman, taking something - anything -that might ease her passage, sees the Green, the flow, and dies easy and content. The other, a fool, liar and cheat out for a cheap thrill, gets Alec Holland's death and the horror of being a muck monster.

It's deeper than "Nite of Spring" and to my mind better, both in itself and in the wider light it casts upon the two poles of the Swamp Things nature. Randall's inks aren't particularly apt but Koch impresses by slowly mutating from rigid, objective panel grids to weirder layouts, fluid or jagged as appropriate. Swamp Thing impresses by the sheer quality of its fill ins, so that isn't a jarring interuption, but back to the Gothic next month.

"Bogeyman" Swamp Thing 44

Back on-series, we find things slowly falling apart between the inherent contradictions of individual stories and a continuing epic. There's good work here not hitting the mark properly, and the series is losing momentum as a result.

"Bogeyman" (so much for those two word titles) reaches down into the psyche to pull out a traditional childhood terror: the Bogeyman will get you if you don't watch out. Only, in this section of the readership, that childhood terror is either buried too deep, or else holds no power, because it didn't work for me. Bogeymen your

too close to the silliness of childhood, lacking shadows. For you, Moore may have struck some primal core.

Complete in this issue, despite fan-press reports of a multi-parter, 'Bogeyman' sees Moore going for the mythic linkage, as with the Werewolf, but the menace this time is strictly modern and strictly realistic. Serial killers are a sick phenomenon in America, a society of killers who kill for killings sake, incessantly. The Bogeyman connection is obvious but...

Part of what affects the material is how perfunctory it all seems. Ten out of twenty-two pages are given over to sub-plots and when Swampy encounters the monster, he dispatches him with such ease that it becomes hard to think of this un-named, unseen, unknown person as being dangerous. Set against those other incidents - a comic visit to Abby's house, an expanded and animated replay of Constantine's drink with Steve Dayton in "Crisis" 3 and a funny encounter with the Batman... well, the Bogeyman never gets to be really important.

Which is not to say it isn't well done. Moore/Bissette/Totleben give us the killer from behind his eyes from the mind of someone who has killed 165 people and who remembers every pair of eyes. Yet that human element is itself ultimately impenetrable; like a glass eye, glazed and slippery

At the end Constantine explains his low-profile by saying that Swampy has now attracted enough attention to draw the weirdies independantly, and gives a welcome hint that things will soon come to a head. About time. Looking back, I m struck by how few of the specific promises have been kept; Constantine has done little, Swampy learned little. The parade of horrors has been rather obscure for something meant to alter the public conception.

And I'm sensing a lapse between the overall story and the desire to keep episodes self-contained; overall there is little cohesion or pattern, individually a lack of impact ("The Curse" an honourable exception). Possibly the climax will redeem and fulfill these episodes - as a "Cerebus" fan I should expect that! But, where Sim paces a story across several issues, Moore and DC aim for the commercial jugular. Hanging on at the halfway stage, more in hope than expectation

Incidentally, just before this issue I met Bissette and Totleben at UKCAC 85. They don't look like they've got sick minds

"Ghost Dance" Swamp Thing 43

This is rather more like it. From the opening page there's the sense of pieces falling into place, sharp and glistening, wet and slick with blood. Two gunmen, quarrelling in a room with thirteen fireplaces, in a gunfight. Needless of the fact that they are, literally, shooting themselves to bits

Just as with "The Curse", all the elements of this story build upon each other, forming an irresistable pattern, sucking in the reader, making him part of the smooth, soft flow of events. Rattling him thoroughly.

It's (obviously) a ghost story, or rather the haunted house, the old Cambridge house, ancestral home of a family of gun manufacturers. Very simply, with full moral inevitability, the house is haunted by the victims of those guns. Cowboys and Indians, Buffalo from the plains, comic, twisted rabbits, villains and victims and suicides restlessly roaming a house where silence has fallen, awaiting the sound of hammer s falling

There's a chill reek to the story, reminiscent of the Arcane trilogy; this is Moore's oblique narration of evils that conceal, momentarily, the true nature of what happened. Little girls, looking like they have red ribbons in their hair. The slow, accumulating stench and weight of death.

And four live humans, roaming this house, humanity out for its traditional sceptical lark amongst the dead This time the humour fits the horror; gallows humour The absurdity of the buffalo in the closet is deliberately likened to Warner Brothers cartoons, whilst Rod's encounter with the dead woman who starts to embrace him is underlaid with bleak, cold comic narrative.

Moore judges Swampy's appearance to perfection (and links it perfectly with the old 'touch wood' superstition) by saving him until almost the end, by when the ghosts are unreeling and the story racing to a measured chaos If the victory is again easy, then this time it s made effective by being seen as the result of understanding - what's more an understanding that Swampy himself hasn't yet recognised, of lessons learned in the past few months. Movement and morality And the story is never over, like the best ghost stories another death will create another Cambridge ghost and another horror

And then the moment we've long been awaiting, as Constantine steps from the shadows, complete with two of his colleagues, to answer a few questions. Like, what the hell is going on. Next issue - probably the host of the "Crisis Crossovers".

Just to mention that this was the issue that David Lloyd was to draw before schedules intervened. Stan Woch does an excellent job, yet again, and if Bissette and Totleben are to step down after next issue as has been stated then is all fairness Woch ought to get the job permanently. They're all sick in the head!

"Revelations" Swamp Thing 44

Boo Boy

I may well end up eating my own words when the Gothic eventually reaches its Crisis, because here we get the awaited "Crisis Crossover" and Moore exerts himself to the fullest, drawing strings and threads together to give you the very distinct impression that he knew what he was doing all along

Where we are here in the end of the World, as we first saw in "Crisis" 5 when the last five got strung in a row like pearls on a wire. Naturally, Wolfman being Wolfman and Moore being Moore, it's rather more impressionistic here, and thus the surreality of intermingled past present and future comes over rather better. Bissette and Totleben have fun together on all those straight and serious heroes of the DC Universe who don't usually get drawn by wickoes

Not a lot happens. For all that we've two dozen assorted super-freaks hanging about (including Ambush Bug, I'm happy to say) not a punch is thrown. What we get is that ever-important commodity, answers. And explanations. John Constantine (who hasn't given anything away about himself except for references to that job last year in Newcastle but who is seen to be on speaking terms with the Phantom Stranger) sits down and tells the Swamp Thing just what is going on

After twelve months of "Crisis on Infinite Earths" issue 12 of which I read immediately before this comic, it could be galling to some to find Alan Moore side-stepping 1985's biggest affair, and very neatly out-flanking it. Oh, that'll work out okay, assures Constantine blithely, this is what you've got to worry about. It's an effective contrast to Alexander Luthor, who's been panicking about reality in "Crisis" and who casually thanks Swampy: I hear you'll take care of that.

It's all very simple. There's this ancient cult of male witches who own the Earth and who are very evil (they make waistcoats out of dead men's skin and turn baby's into that sick thing of "Growth Patterns" - told you it was vile, it s even got Constantine in a sweat) They saw the Crisis coming and jumped on its back, to use the resulting spiritual disturbance to awaken something They're going to destroy Heaven

Ah, well... I can see something very big and wonderful coming and I can also see DC walking into a lot of religious trouble here if they're not very careful. Destroying Heaven - killing God - is as high a stake as you can raise, and it behooves caution.

Lots of little bits and pieces, the most effective style of story-telling, fall into place here Constantine dominates, swinging from arrogance to assurance, from concern to cool. All Swampy's perils have been merely

eye-openers, and not a positive role for him. That knowledge will help, but the real knowledge, the teaser, the carrot dangled for the dancing Swamp Thing, is to be dispensed next month, at the Parliament of Trees

This month ends with another glimpse of that nick thing the Invunche, mercifully oblique. Sister Anne-Marie, the nun who looks like Lee Dawson, is killed after a brief but intense three pages set in London, an impression of crammed detail that is, for once, accurate. I doubt however if the Americans will get the joke behind "Mornington Crescent".

"The Parliament of Trees" Swamp Thing 47

In another comic, this game of musical artists (Woch and Randall on this episode) would be fatal to a continuing story, but the astonishing ability of so many people to replicate each others visions, and the renewed strength of Alan Moore's scripting binds the work together. "The Parliament of Trees" takes another step forwards (plus two sideways) towards not just the eventual conclusion of the Gothic, but also Moore's conclusion to his stint. Not to mention another dose of perspective, binding together those piecemeal issues of recent months.

As well as the principal story, there's the first sign of a continuing sub-plot, which clearly won't come to fruition just yet. Since it's nothing to do with the Gothic we shall just ignore it, here and after.

Ah, the Parliament of Trees. It's a flowering(sorry!) of the ideas planted (!) by Moore in the framing sequence of 33's reprint, which brought into continuity the original Swamp Thing 10 pager from "House of Secrets" 92. The Parliament is composed of Swampy's answers; of them, only Alec Olsen retains the memory of human speech. Flesh wonders. Wood knows.

We're at the realisation of Constantine's promise, back at the beginning, the promise of knowledge. It is, after all, what commonly forms the climax of an Alan Moore story, be it Marvelman, V or now Swamp Thing. For Swampy it is the understanding, truly, of what he is, through seeing what stock he comes from. It is insight and revelation that may aid him in the clash now being engineered by Constantine - but it is gained at a price, and the price may be high. Swampy's perceptions may have been human, and this limitation he now understands, but he doesn't yet realise how human he still remains: too human for his peers who, to his astonishment and hurt, reject him for wishing for power, to be effective, too human to notice that there must be a purpose to his existing, to them all existing; too human to ask why?

It's a beautifully cloaked piece of characterisation for Moore, even more subtle than he's want to be. The pieces are obvious enough, but they are not assembled for either us or Swamp Thing, and so the questions about purpose don't arise until after, until it can be seen that the omission of this is deliberate

The Parliament introduces a layer of ambiguity (moral ambivalence?) where previously all seemed clear: Good vs Evil. It's not in the questioning of what is nature is evil but in the far more fundamental question of what role the Swamp Thing should be playing. He is an Earth Elemental, and Earths quality is endurance and solidity, not in the play of power, which is what Swampy seeks, at Constantine's behest.

It is clearly thought-provoking, even as it seems to disappoint, with the brevity and coolness of Swampy's audience with the Parliament. Enough is glimpsed however, to set off a reaction

The last two issues have done almost enough to pull together the cycle of horrors that we've been witness to Swampy sees them as a cycle, an odyssey of horrors that has revealed to him a natural evil he finds hard to tolerate (just as he found Hell's existence hard to accept). The actual stories did fall short of that, and the roots (again!) of the story are maybe not quite strong enough for its current growth

Technically the "American Gothic" is ended, and we're entering the end phase, the building to a conclusion, to a Dark Apocalypse.

One conclusion is right in Moore's. We know he's only carrying on for one year after no. 50, and who in there can follow him? I think that we can now see the ending. The Clean Thing concludes that Swampy isn't ready yet to surrender his humanity, to become wood and to join the Parliament, but the end cannot be long postponed now Swampy has seen, and he will begin to withdraw his consciousness, even from Abby, until nothing remains but... Election Day

(Any votes for that as the title of issue 52?

"A Murder of Crows" Swamp Thing 48

This is getting very heavy. The villains stand forth, the stakes are revealed, the game is afoot - and we're losing

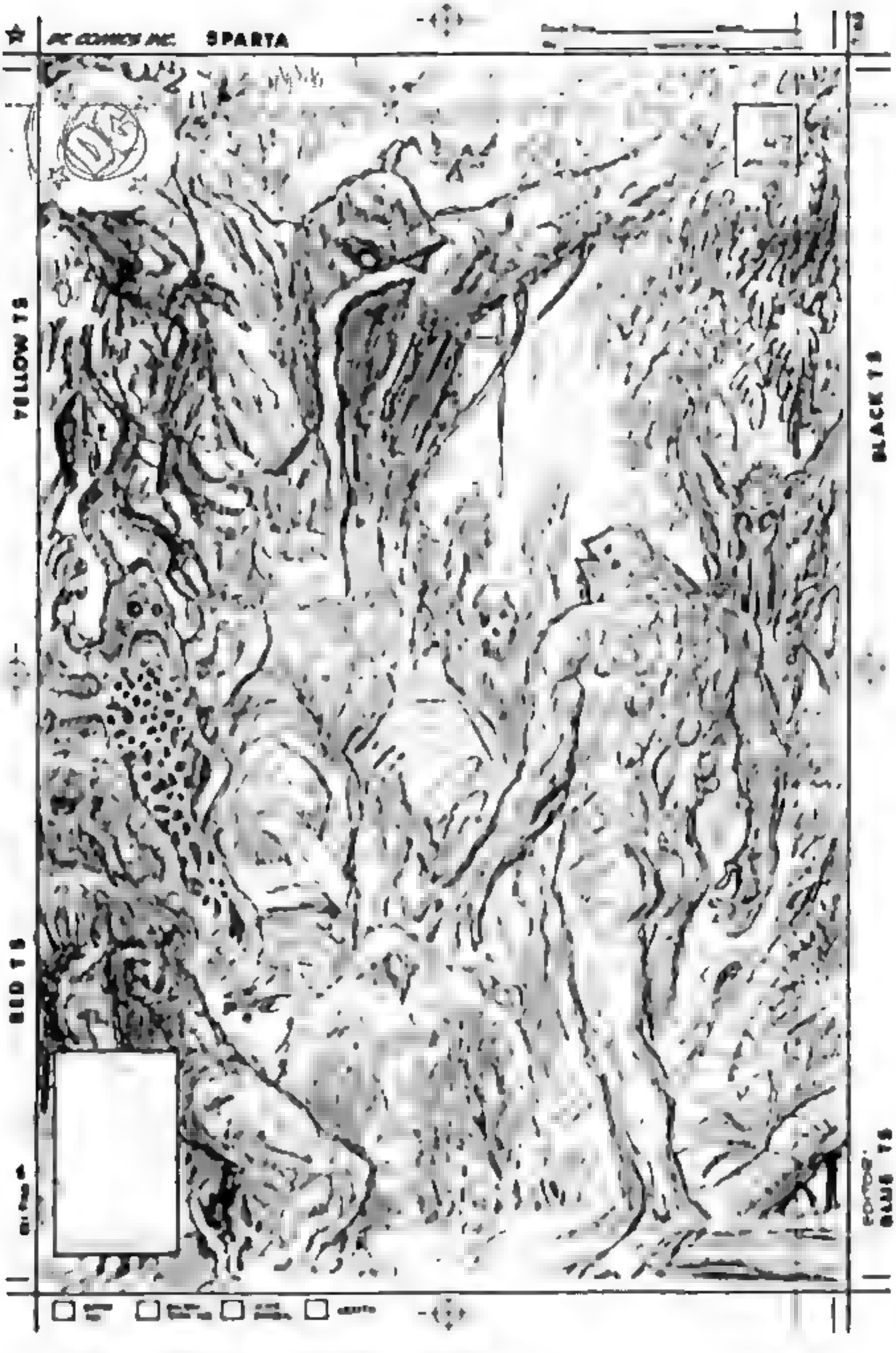
One year on we're at the beginning of the end, the final three parts that bring the Swamp Thing to the very front line. The horrors fall behind and the horror-makers move up, the Brujeria, set on ousting down the Divine Usurper. One can't help feeling that in certain parts of Moral Majority America, this sort of thing is going down like a brick pigeon

It goes without saying that this is a beautifully constructed issue. Away from the monster-of-the-month parade Moore is better able to concentrate upon his material, and the effect is beneficial. Each step and stage is thought out, and interlocks beautifully.

There's a bravura opening, with John Totleben making an immediate solo mark as a flight of crows descends to black out the page, and after that its Constantine and his much-reduced ranks marching on the Brujeria in frontal attack. To be honest, with one exception (to be reached momentarily) these sides have been redundant; apart from the great series of character sketches in "Growth Patterns" Two of them have been offed off-stage, and even those we've seen dim have done nothing to suggest that they're a loss. In fact, interesting as he's been, Constantine hasn't done all that much either.

The real meat comes at the very end, and is one of the most coldly horrifying moments of this or any other series:sustained, poised, stretched out. The only one of

MART '86



Above: Pencils from the cover of Swamp Thing #

Constantine a team to amount to anything, Judith the punk, turns traitor, and her reward is to be transformed into a crow. It s there in slow, fascinating detail, in the foreground, as in the background Swampy clings to the humanity he should have abandoned and saves Constantine, rather than halt the transformation. Woman into crow in awful detail - guts vomited out, body shrivelling, the head stretched and pulled into shape... glaargh

For the moment, the Brujeria have won a first battle. A messenger has been sent, a crow to carry a pearl of evil. No doubt the word is "Havoc!" War gathers on the slopes of heaven

"The Summoning" Swamp Thing 49

A dark bird on a dark journey from here to there... the gathering of the final defenders to meet an overwhelming threat, each and everyone of DC s mystic types joining the cause. Simple stuff, but Lord, how powerful!

There's overtones of Tolkein, of that point in "Lord of the Rings" when the forces of the West marshall in the defence of Gondor I ve drawn comparisons before between elements in Moore's work and LOTR - inevitable really since the book is a classic of mythic imagination and comics is a field that draws (albeit weakly) upon mythic stock. "The Summoning" takes us to the very brink of an apocalyptical clash, a Tolkeinsate tale of the battle of Good and Evil, of Heaven against the Original Shadow

Partly we re back in the territory of the Dead Men, of the 1984 Annual There's Swampy, returning through the Green to the Outer Lands, gathering forces Deadman, the Phantom Stranger, Etrigan and certain of his brethern, the Spectre.

And there's Constantine, on Earth (as it is in Heaven) dragging into a circle all the Earthbound mystics, conning Baron Winters and Sargon the Sorcerer, dragging Zatara along with Zatanna 'cos Daddy doesn't trust his daughter alongside ol John, twisting Mento's arm... and picking up Dr Fate and Occult without even trying

Summonings. Moore's work is full of parallels. As Constantine and Swampy move around, gathering defenders, the dark bird carrying its dark pearl beats on. Everyone sees it, as it passes from the cave of the Brujeria, through reality, the Unconscious (Cain and Abel, falling to quarre s and murder) the newly dead (Deadman), the Borderlands (the Spectre, letting the bird pass in supreme confidence at his powers, desiring to meet a foe worthy of him), Hell (Etrigan) and out beyond the last semblances of order (the Three Demons), to drop its pearl in the seething ocean of chaos and summon

Ah, that's the next and the last issue. For now it's just a tide, a massive rising tide on the furthest shores of Hell (another one of Tolkein's preoccupations too, you know) Meet the enemy.

"The End" Swamp Thing 50

Well, yes it is. Only - what kind of an ending is it? On a first reading (eager to discover what happens), I was struck by several disjunctive things Good bits. Very good bits Confusing and possibly pretentious attempts to explain the nature of and reason for Evil, is this necessary, right and proper in a comic book? Yes, it bloody well is. A typical Alan Moore climax. A feeling of anti-climax.

On a second reading, a lot of objections dissolved The more I read this comic, the more it fell together, each part interdependant, the effect cumulative, and slowly making more and more sense It still doesn t make this comic easy to review, even after the detailed attention paid to the past fourteen issues

Oh, simple enough to pick and pull at elements - Moore's continuingly excellent handling of the Demon, and especially of the Phantom Stranger (series! series! series!), the deaths of Sargon the Sorceror and of Zatara, Zatanna s reaction to the last, Bissette/Veitch/ Totleben's art (ok, I give up. Who pencilled what? I can't tell). Simple even to identify that climax as being in Alan Moore's style of illumination and understanding as opposed to a damn great punch-up (not that we do without a damn great punch-up but it's all forlorn in the face... for want of a better word... of the adversary,

But just as the issue requires time and thought to pull its strings together, so to does this review More so it needs the full weight of those fourteen other issues to properly balance it. But I've already said my peice on them, and what's said must remain. That perhaps is the failing of this format.

I can relate part of this review to Moore's recent 'Writing for Comics" series, to the part where he points out that a story must be about something, must have a point. In this, he is like Harlan Ellison, demanding commitment, demanding that a part of the writer be exposed in all that he writes. The point of this story, of the entire series, comes in two pages where the Swamp Thing voluntarily, fatalistically, enters the substance of the adversary and communicates with it

He isn't the first. In turn, Etrigan, Dr Fate and The Spectre, within the shadow, defying and defining Evil have given their own view, have taught the original darkness something of its nature. Have revealed (to us) a fraction of the darkness' history.

It seeks, it seeks explanations and definitions. It doesn't appear, of itself to be evil, to be that absence of the divine light that we'd understand to be the opposite of light. It Was, originally, but the light rejected it and excluded it, and it has lived eternity beyond, wondering what the light is, why it is excluded and what it is. It is a natural force, seeking admission

Etrigan names it as Darkness, which is, always has been, always will be excluded. This definition raises complex theological issues, touched upon in the 1984 Annual, in Moore's argument for the existence of Hell Etrigan is a creature of the light, a creature of God too

Dr Fate names it ignorance, forever sucking down man in his growth towards light and knowledge, a view that derives from Fate's Egyptian heritage, of Gods of light and darkness He too teaches the complete seperation of light and dark

The Spectre speaks for Jehovah, God of retribution and punishment, not forgiveness and mercy. Evil exists to be punished in order that men shall fear God more and cleave to him more surely. This is not merely the Spectre of primeval power, the limitless being who guards the borderlands, but also Fleisher a frightening, hideous sadist For perhaps the first time a reconciliation between the disparate portraits of the Spectre can be envisaged.

Through each of these the adversary learns, but is still not satisfied All that he learns is conflict, the struggle that all the defenders seek to avert, yet with their attitudes make more certain And it is a hopeless struggle. Even the Spectre cannot stand against this thing. Only when the absolutely final line of defence, the angels who come at the Stranger's call, upon old, half-hinted-at kinship, fall, does the Swamp Thing step forward

Swampy goes into the adversary voluntarily. Neither is he certain, as everyone else has been, that he knows what evil is. In fact his uncertainty is disposed early on, in a powerful, all-encompassing summing-up of his odyssey, his experiences, the equivocations of the Parliament of Trees .. all of which leave him bemused, lacking all understanding as to what evil is, and also what is good And whether they are seperate

It is finally that indecision that communicates with the adversary Or rather, not indecision, but a growing understanding, expressed in the same natural terms used by the Parliament, that good and evil are interdependant, inter-locked Earth terms - humous, decay, rich, dark soil, the cycle of nature. Flesh wonders. Wood knows. The Parliament conveys an understanding of what it is that flesh, wondering, lacks.

And a giant hand of gold reaches down as a giant hand of ebony reaches up, and the original light and the original dark meet and mingle. And the realm of the spirit changes

The Phantom Stranger describes it in sub-electrical terms, in a reference to the aftermath of the storm. A polarisation that has built up has been discharged Good and Evil now meet, each throwing the other into relief, instead of shunning and opposing.

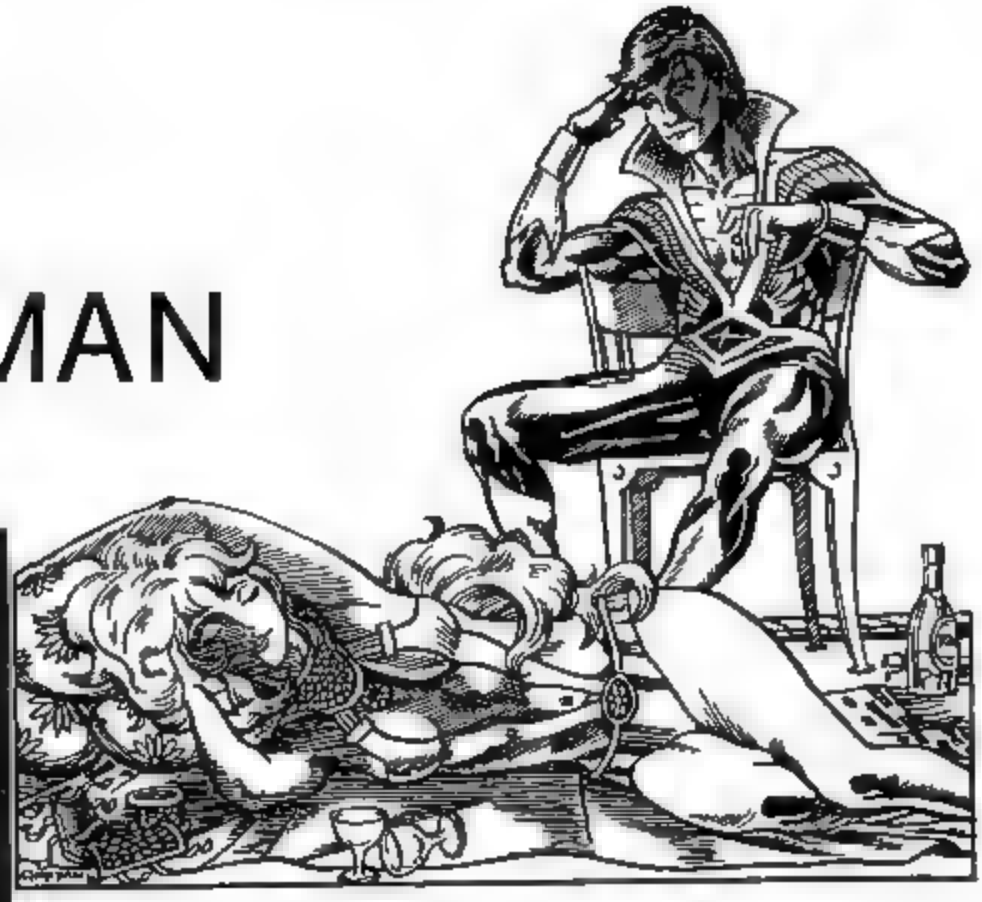
In a way, what comes after the ending is weak Moore's insistence on playing out his morality tale under the eyes of the Unconcious (Cain and Abel) deprives him of space in the last few pages to treat the after-effects. Etrigan and the Spectre depart off-stage, and we are left to guess at random how they are affected - the Spectre in particular is an interesting case, defeated and unhooded, grotesque and crying for forgiveness for failure he is broken, decisively, by Moore, and is a sense his usefulness is over forever Less telling here, and more showing would be more appealing than the random cruelties of Cain (who in any event comes over as more definitely evil than the adversary)

A spiritual Crimisi upon Infinite Levels I'd like to see the aftermath, feel the damage, make this odyssey seem as if its point has mattered. But the road has ended here and so too the review. If I wait any linger, I'll get entangled in a new story, that sub-plot I avoided a few months ago, and this Cumulative Review will never end.

American Gothic, The deepness and darkness of our soul. Heavy country and one where steps ran oft agley, but I think we made it through. To The End ●

MART
86

MARV WOLFMAN



I caught up with Marv at Scotcon '85 and chatted to him on each of the 2 days. Marv has been writing comics for a long time but he made his mark with Tomb of Dracula, one of the best series that Marvel have published.

After moving to DC, Marv recreated the New Teen Titans and, with George Perez pencilling, it became DC's top selling title.

Marv's latest blockbuster was the twelve issue series, Crisis on Infinite Earths, also with George Perez, which featured every DC character he could fit in.

The follow-up to Crisis, The History of the DC Universe, is the next thing to make an appearance as well as the long-awaited revamping of Superman into what he used to be.

My thanks to Marv for his time, and I hope your success continues,

BEST, Paul

Marv: I came into American fandom about a year or two after it started. Jerry Bails, who's sort of considered the father of comics fandom, saw my name in a Mystery in Space letter column and sent me a fanzine. At the same time Gordon Love, who did The Rocket Blast, also sent me a zine. That was the first time I realised there was an organised fandom. Within a year I started submitting work to them, and because I was one of the few New York fans I went up to the DC offices all the time, so I would do articles about my trips and all that stuff. In the mid-60s DC used to give tours on Tuesdays and Thursdays. I was an art major and the artschool was only a couple of blocks away from DC, so I would get out just in time for the tour. They got to know me, and the news I got was put into my articles.

Sometime along the line I decided to do my own fanzines, and I did a lot of them. Super Adventure (superheroes), The Foob (comedy), Stories of Suspense (that was the horror fanzine where I published Stephen King's first story), What th...? (which was an opinion-type fanzine). I always made sure that I sent copies to the companies. I was doing a lot of it to learn how to become professional but it was also a lot of fun.

Paul: You've had art training, and you were an art teacher, yet you entered comics as a writer. Why was that?

M: I wanted to be an artist but I would have to write stories so I could draw them. I thought I could write them better than the other fans could, but I found I could draw the comic book stuff just well enough - I was more of a designer. So I kept on writing and everyone liked my writing more than my art.

The first published work I did appeared in Castle of Frankenstein. Len Wein and I wrote, drew and lettered it. My first solo work was for Blackhawk. At that point the editors of Blackhawk had changed the concept to a group of junkie superheroes. It was dreadful, so I wrote a script on my own explaining how they turned back into the original Blackhawks again. I sent it to the editor and it sat on his desk, unopened, for a year. He eventually left DC, and Dick Giordano took over, found the script in his desk, saw me at a convention and asked me if I still wanted it read. I said yes, and Dick bought the story. He didn't buy the dialogue, just the story, and he had Bob Haney write it. At the same time Joe Orlando, who knew me through the fanzines, asked me to redialogue some of his story. So, simultaneously I was dialoging someone else's story and someone else was dialoging my story.

After that I did a lot of mystery stories, love stories, Jerry Lewis, Johnny Double, Teen Titans. I wanted to be a writer at that point, and it didn't matter what I wrote. I didn't see comics as just superhero comics.

P:At that time there were many genres to write whereas nowadays there tends to be just superheroes.
M:Exactly. People in the business still ask me today how I can write 4 different comics simultaneously. I just switch from doing 5 pages of one to doing 5 pages of another. It's just natural. I don't see why there should be any question about it

I don't think I approach the different genres in different ways. I tend to write more realistic horror stories because they re more about people, while superhero stories are about ideas. I just do it and I try to do the best I can for each genre
P You wrote a Batman story around that time
M Len and I did that. That was a funny one because we presented it to Julie Schwartz and he didn t want to read it. We were only fledglings and Julie only worked with the top pros. We did a very straight-forward horror story, and this was when DC were doing the campy Batman. As fans we thought that this was the direction that Batman should go in. So, after Julie wouldn t read it, we gave it to Dick Giordano, who had heard that we had written it, and wanted to read it. He liked it and suggested to Julie that he should read it. Julie read it and asked us to make one big change, so we rewrote it. I forget what happened exactly, but it just sat around until Neal Adams heard about it He read it, and on his own, without telling anyone but us, he drew it, and then presented it whole to Julie as a finished product. It was only later that Julie realised that it was our story. However, by the time that Neal had did this they had already changed the Batman back to what we had originally wanted. Len, Neal, Denny O'Neil and I had all read the old Batmans, and we all came from the same fan mentality that wanted Batman to return to the dark vigilante of the night.
P:You wrote the Vigilante too (in Adventure), as drawn by Gray Morrow. Did you look back at the Mort Meskin originals for that?
M:In that case, I had read some of the originals, but it had been updated to such a degree by the time that I did some that there was no need to change it.

My work at the time was dreadful. It was the worst part of my life and consequently I had a lot of problems. I was ignoring the advice Joe Orlando was giving me, and it was only a year later that I learned it was accurate advice. Later on I figured out what Joe was talking about on my own and incorporated most of his suggestions into my work. We all go through that stage of thinking we know it all, and it's hard to avoid it. It's part of the working process. All the failures over the years makes you into what you eventually are.
P:As long as you learn from your failures
M:Yes. Otherwise it s a waste of time
P You also did Supergirl, who you've recently killed off in Crisis.
M:Even back then I felt that Supergirl was a character that could have more depth. The unfortunate thing is that nobody really cared about the character and I don't think that I cared much for her either
P Up to this stage you were writing one-off stories. Then you wrote a few issues of the Teen Titans.
M When Len and I took over the Teen Titans we were only a few years older than the characters. We did a story that created a black superhero for DC Remember, this was a long time ago, under a previous administration. Dick Giordano showed the story to the publisher and he was all for it. We couldn t believe it. He wanted us to basically violate the comics code and have a really hard-hitting story. However, by the time the story was finished a new publisher had come in. He saw the story, panicked, and said the story was badly written, which nobody argued with. Neal Adams said he d rewrite it. Nick Cardy had done his best ever work on it, using new techniques and styles. After Neal had redialogued the story, the publisher still said it was badly done. It was then that we realised that he just didn't want it printed. The strip was rejected. Although I have no copies of the artwork, I still have the script, and if I ever do get copies I'll print it in the regular Teen Titans book. Neal then redid the story himself from scratch in 3 days, with Nick Cardy inking They incorporated several pages of the original into the storyline but there were changes. The black superhero became a white one. The cover of that issue had one colour over the crowd. That was

done at the last moment to disguise the fact that it was an entirely black crowd. Our character was called Jericho and has changed that to Joshua. The only reason why I recently put Jericho into the Titans was because I was going to put Jericho into the book one way or another.

P: Did these politics interfere with your writing?

M: Essentially we were blacklisted by the company.

They gave other reasons. Artwork was missing so they assumed it was us, the fans, because we were young kids. It was found to be someone on staff, but that was a year later. The only people who gave us work over the year were Dick Giordano and Joe Orlando, who continued to give us short mystery stories that could be buried in the books. They kept us going all that time, but that's basically why we did very few stories at that time. I became a teacher, and then moved back into comics as Joe Kubert's associate editor. When the cut backs meant the associate editors had to go I moved on to Warren as an editor.

P: What did you do with Joe Kubert?

M: I was the associate editor on Tarzan, John Carter and the new books. I would assess a.l the reprints, proof-read a.l the material, do rewriting if necessary, write the letter columns, and anything else Joe asked me to do.

P: You've written John Carter 3 times: for DC; for Edgar Rice Burroughs Inc.; and for Marvel. Did you approach the character in a different way for each?

M: I'm one of those people who tries to give the editor what he wants within the bounds of what I want. The DC and ERB ones were both aimed for the editor, but the Marvel job I did as I wanted it, because I was my own editor. That was the only one I was satisfied with.

P: Was the art ever done for the ERB version?

M: Dave Cockrum did 4 or 5 pages, I believe.

Interestingly enough when Marvel got the rights to the same story, Dave brought in his copy of the script when I was on the West Coast, and they had Alex Nino draw it, because Dave was too busy to do it. In fact, Dave had been my choice to do it at DC but nobody trusted him because he was brand new. Unfortunately Alex drew the characters so young looking that it was unusable, and at the last moment we decided to do another story which Gil Kane drew. I had chosen Rudy Nebres to ink Gil over a lot of other inkers. Everybody said that it wouldn't work, but I thought that Rudy's pencils looked similiarto Gil's, the elongated figures etc. Gil loved it, at least in the early issues, but later on Rudy started to over-render the art and

Gil's pencils eventually got lost.
P:After a while on the series did you feel you were losing your direction because there were a lot of fill-in artists?
M At that time I was writing about 6 books a month because I needed the money, and I didn't have a clear view anymore. After Gil left I didn t have a consistant artist on the feature, and so I decided to get off it. Also you can t do very much with John Carter beyond the adaptations because it's not the most brilliant concept in the world.
P What did you do at Warren?
M:I was the story editor, which meant that I had no control over the art, which Bill DuBay did, but I did have control over everything else. I was responsible for a lot of the revolutions at Warren. I introduced series, themebooks (the Dracula book was supposed to be a series of stories through time, but they changed the order), long stories (I commissioned a 50-page story which had never been done before at Warren), and even having 1 large coupon for the ads instead of hundreds of little ones
P Would you consider Tomb of Dracula to be your best body of work?
M Yes, without a doubt. It represents my first work at Marvel and my last. It was me growing, on a feature that had no precedent. Stan Lee, Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko set a style for superheroes that everyone else at Marvel, myself included, followed, maybe adding a little bit here or there but essentially the Marvel style. Nobody had ever done a horror series before and Tomb of Dracula was the first. Though I was the fourth writer on the book, nobody before me lasted for more than 2 issues so no no style was set. Previously, anyone doing horror stories did them in the EC style with the twist endings and the shocks in short stories, not series. For the first time I was able to carve out my own concepts, completely from scratch. Consequently I think it is my best body of work because it s 100% me

Gene Colan is a phenomenally good artist He's been highly underrated partly because he's always being put on superheroes and I don't think he s as good on those. I don't think he thinks he s as good on those either He's had eye problems for quite a while now, which is why his art is now a bit different to what it used to be. His art hasn't declined it s just that he can t see. I believe it's being corrected, so hopefully he ll be back soon.

I love working with Gene. He's a lovely man. He added an awful lot to Dracula. The stories were very tight, and we worked separately on them. Obviously we would talk about switching things around, but we didn't work on the stories together
P Did Gene prefer to work that way?
M:Gene would prefer me to give as little as possible in order to draw three-panel pages. I never did that, and I would never do that. I write very detailed plots, broken down page by page

It was a partnership made in Heaven because we all totally cared about that book. It was the first time Gene had a book he felt he could draw. He had to audition to get on Tomb of Dracula, after it had been assigned to George Tuska. Gene said,'No No.No I want to do it', drew up pages on his own for free, submitted them, and it was only then that Stan said he could do it. Tom Palmer couldn't be pried off the book once it got started. Even John Constanza specifically asked to letter the book every single month, and the only time he ever missed it was when he was on vacation
P How did you get onto the book?
M Gerry Conway, Archie Goodwin and Gardner Fox had done two issues each, and I had just got off Captain Marvel, which I had ruined beyond belief No-one thought that Tomb of Dracula would survive because the horror craze hadn t begun at that time. I was known as a horror writer because of all the DC horror stories I had done, so they asked me to do Dracula. I wanted to do Dr. Strange, and I hadn't even read the Dracula novel, or seen any of the movies. I wasn t interested in vampires in the slightest, but I desperately needed the work so I said okay. I read the novel and fell in love with it. To date I've only seen the Frank Langella Dracula movie
P What was the hook in the book?
M I've always been interested by the concept of immortality, which is one of the reasons I liked John Carter as a kid, because he was essentially immortal. Edgar Rice Burroughs called John Carter, The Immortal Warrior, and I think he chose the name

John Carter very carefully from the legend of the wandering Jew who had many names. One was John, another was Cartofulus. I'm sure that Burroughs was very well read in the Bible and there are too many coincidences for that not to be the source. So the concept of immortality, of evil, and the fact that I could do stories about how people react to evil, all came out of Bram Stoker's novel.
P:A lot of the atmosphere came from a gradual build-up of the story over several issues, rather than the quick-moving antics of superhero stories.
M:Since I was creating my own niche I had no precedent to base it on, so I just did what I thought was right. I was figuring it out as I was doing the book. I wish I could say that I had it all worked out from the beginning but I didn t. I just had a facility for writing horror material, and I learned my writing craft while doing Tomb of Dracula. The only thing that I had decided when I came onto the book was that I would never do thought balloons for Dracula, though I did once or twice by accident, that I would always focus on Dracula's effect on people, and that the people element of the story would be what motivated it. My feeling from the beginning was that if you got to know Dracula too well he'd become boring and the reader would lose interest in him
P:And he'd become sympathetic too.
M Exactly. I wanted him to be sympathetic to a degree otherwise he'd have no nobility, which was a vital facet, but at the same time he had to be totally evil. It was this dichotomy that I kept playing against and on for the entire series. So what I had decided upon for the comic was what I had taken out of the novel. He was disgustingly evil,but he was also a Count
P What influences do you have for your horror work?
M:I don't think you need any for a field that's about raw emotion. Horror appeals to me because you're taking the human nerve and stretching it to its utmost. I don't have to know how Stephen King or Clive Barker are handling that. I read, and enjoy, their stuff but I don t necessarily have to know how anyone else does that stuff. What that may do is dilute my version of horror.

After the comic book had finished we had a black & white Dracula magazine which I edited. I came into

the Marvel offices one day and someone told me Tom Palmer might not be available to ink the next issue. Tom had inked it for 7 years up to that point. I said,"No, he s inking it." They said that just in case why not look at an inker who inked Nova on another project. I said I'd have a look, but that Tom was still inking the issues. It was the only series at that time that had had no change in talent for such a long time. So I looked at this other project and an editor told me that this guy was inking the present issue of Dracula, and that the art had already been sent out. I didn't believe this and when I went back to the other office they confirmed that the pencils had already been sent out. When I asked why, they said,"We didn't think you d care." I quit the book on page 6 of issue 1. I quit the book because they did it behind my back. If they had been upfront about it I would have fought it to the death, but at least it would have been upfront. Interestingly enough Tom had been assigned to a book by the assistant editor of that other book, which meant they had done it for their own ends. Jim Shooter got Tom back on the book and essentially made everything good again. In retrospect only I can say that it was that day specifically that led me to quit Marvel because I realized that my power to Dracula had been cut off. I stayed for another 8 months and when I left for DC I lost out to a certain extent because Jim was offering me more to stay at Marvel than DC were offering for me to come over.

P I had heard that Jim Shooter was responsible for you leaving Marvel but as you have just explained he tried to help. A lot of these stories got distorted over time

M:A quote that I had made when Rick Marschall had got fired over the phone,"You don't do that to people", was unfortunately printed after I left Marvel so it sounded as though I d quit over something like that. I still think that regardless of the reason Jim fired Rick, he should have been told face-to-face instead of over the phone

P Creators rights started having an effect on the industry about 5 years ago. Would you have carried-on doing Dracula if you had the rights to the comic character?

M Creators rights don't indicate that you're going to stay on the book. I quit Vigilante, as much to do Crisis, which I make less money on, as because I was losing a direction. I didn't know which way to go with Vigilante. I'm far more interested in doing a job I like rather than just for the money I have a certain amount of money coming in from my rights to the Teen Titans and Vigilante, so I can do jobs for people, to help out occasionally, because that's the way it is.

P I didn't think much of Nova until the last few issues by Infantino/Palmer when it really started to gather impetus.

M Nova was a kids comic. I had a reputation at that time of not being able to write superheroes I was literally learning to write superheroes on Nova, and it only started to click near the end Conceptually I always saw Nova as being written for a very young audience with very simple stories I think it was successful in that, but it was totally wrong for profits. I really started to understand what I was doing in the end. When I was assigned Spiderman, who I d asked for, Jim, who was only an assistant editor at the time, was really mad because he thought I'd write it the same way I d written Nova. In fact his first comment when he read my first issue was that it was far better than he'd expected. The main thing was that I'd got all the crap out of my system while writing Nova, the early Daredevils etc. You have to learn somehow and unfortunately my mistakes are out there for everyone to see.

It was probably a mistake to write Nova for a very young audience because every time I've tried to cater a story downward I've ruined it. When I did Dial H for Hero we intentionally aimed that for 9 year olds, because we had the idea of distributing them to schools. It failed. When I did the Teen Titans drug books I wrote them like the regular books but with the language slightly simpler. It was much better for the kids to maybe stop to look up a word than to write down to them.

P Why was Robin taken out and The Protector put in?

M For the stupidest reason in the world. DC had a license with Nabisco to produce a line of superhero cookies, for which George designed the boxes. They were awful cookies but that doesn t have anything to do with it. The first drug comic was published by Kellog, a rival cookie company, and as

we couldn't use Robin. I have a copy of the story with Robin and all his lines in it, but we had to take him out for contractual reasons. Kahler panicked and said we'd have to do it all over again. I said we didn t have too, and that we could just redraw Robin's costume, and I could change some of the dialogue. So Dave Manak, the editor, and an artist in his own right, whited out the costume and drew in The Protector's

P Your version of Skull the Slayer would have been somewhat different wouldn't it?

M:When I started at DC the first time around I had an idea for a back-up feature in the mystery books that I thought was phenomenal. The idea was that a modern apartment house in the 20th Century was somehow transported into prehistoric times. Each issue would be about one family and how they coped with no science around them, and with these creatures. I thought it was a very nice concept and very different, because it would be a series, but it wouldn't be a series. When I left DC I approached Roy Thomas at Marvel with this idea. Roy was very interested in the concept of doing a dinosaur book, but Marvel were into superhero series. Roy said that I should get rid of the apartment house and just have someone from the present go into the past, turning it more into a superhero thing. I was looking for work - I've always made the point that half of what we do in the industry is because we have to survive. That's the economics of life. So I did the first two issues and then quit, leaving the book for Steve Englehart. It was not the book that I wanted to do.

I did a lot of one-shot stories for Marvel and DC because I had a reputation for writing very fast. I did the last two issues of Sub-Mariner. I also did a Wonder Woman story a few years ago otherwise it would have gone reprint. I did that overnight. The books were always late at Marvel, so they'd come to me whenever they needed me. Cadence had just taken over and they wanted a 1000 books out a year without an increase of staff, so there were a lot of late books. I was writing six books a month. I can t write 6 books a month, but I was doing it. Right from the beginning I decided that 3 of the books were to be thought about and worked out properly, and the other 3 were for a living and to help out Marvel. I would get letters saying there were two Marv Wolfmans: one who did Tomb of Dracula and Spiderman, and the other who did Spiderwoman, Machine Man and so on. They were right

P:I like the way that you handle potential stereotypes. I remember in Action there was a scene with Superman and some Russians, where the Russians were real people rather than Capitalist-hating warmongers.

M:If you look back to 1969 at my first handling of a Russian character, the superhero Starfire, in an early Teen Titans, the final piece of copy, written by Len, but our combined view, said that people are essentially the same and long after the ideologies of the two countries bite the dust the people will survive. I do not believe there is any major difference between the Russians and American and European people. There is only a difference in the political views. In the main, the morals of the people are essentially the same too

P The Vigilante was nicely set up in the Teen Titans, but it immediately started to pull its punches in his own comic.

M:Yes, I know. Part of the problem was political in that when I created the book I wanted a very hard-hitting comic. I wanted a Dirty Harry in tights as we called it, We holds barred. It took a year to get the contract sorted out and in that time a lot of things changed. The political climate changed, and I have to admit I copped out a bit. Consequently, the book was a bit weaker for it. I M trying to push the present writer, Paul Kupperberg, into being hard hitting again. I let too many of my own political feelings interfere, which I should never have done. The character was correct the way I set him up, but he didn't turn out to be Dirty Harry, or Charles Bronson's character in Death Wish. I m the editor of the book as well and I have to make sure that he s not overly depressing all the time because sales would suffer. As an editor you're not selling individual stories but a series. If one story is not well received, or you experiment with an issue, it doesn t affect sales that much because you re selling a series. If any of the readers of the New Teen Titans were turned off by the "Who is Donna Troy?" and "The Marriage" issues then the issues

before and after had hard-hitting action stories. As it turns out nobody was turned off by those stories. If I was able to, those would be the sort of stories I would write all the time.

P Why did you bring back the Teen Titans?

M When I came over to DC I requested a few things.

I wanted to write Superman, so they assigned me Batman. I didn t want to do any team-up books so they assigned me Worlds Finest, Brave and Bold, and DC Presents. Those were my only two requests, though to be fair they gave me Green Lantern. I decided very quickly that I would create my own characters in order to get off the team-up books. I swapped Batman for Superman with Gerry Conway. If I had a choice I'd have brought back Deadman or Adam Strange, but I'm commercial, so I brought back the Teen Titans. I didn't want the old Titans that had come out, which I felt was a dreadful comic. It wasn t dreadful. It had the wrong attitude. I asked about recreating them and I was turned down. Len and I put our heads together and I created new characters. I asked George Perez if he would like to work on it and he was interested When we showed the characters to Jenette Kahn and she gave the go-ahead our enthusiasm rocketed because she despises the Teen Titans. We wanted to call the book The Titans, but Neal Adams owns the copyright to the name, The Titan, so we couldn't We had to call the book the Teen Titans, so I decided to make the teenage aspect the main part of the book. That's probably the best part of the book, the thing that separates it from all the others, so now I m happy we didn't change the title Failure, growing up and parental guidance are themes that run consistantly through the New Teen Titans, all of which affect 16-19 year olds very strongly. It's a strange time because you're breaking away but you still need guidance from your parents. Because I didn't like the word 'teen' it has little impact in the logo, which I had a hand in designing. It's "The new teen TITANS."

P:You were one of George's biggest critics back in the days when he was doing Sons of the Tiger for Deadly Hands of Kung Fu. Did George see your criticisms as being correct, and so redrew it?

M Not them. He had to redo it because I was his editor. George tells me he used to leave the

Christopher Williams 1986

office cursing me, hating me, and then he'd work on his work and suddenly see that I was right. But that was in retrospect. Right from day one George's storytelling was great. No question about it. His drawing was weak, his backgrounds hideous, and he kept trying to do shots that he just couldn't draw to save his life. If his storytelling wasn t strong then I wouldn't have bothered with him, because, to me, comics are solely storytelling nomatter how good the artwork is. I have turned down working with certain creators because their storytelling has been so horrible, even though they were very good artists. My work would look very impressive if I worked with artist A, but my story would fail, so I'm not interested.

P:To what extent do you co-create a character like The Terminator?

M Everything written for the Terminator is all mine I presented George with the whole plot. Everything visual about the Terminator is all George s. Later it became a combination of us both, I think he's the best character we've created in the New Teen Titans in terms of villainy. There are better villains, but he's the best character. Basically, the early issues were my plots and George s art. He would take my plots and change them, but because he's a good storyteller I would encourage him to change it. Later on, when we eliminated the plot stage, and we just sat down and talked the stories through I think the material became even stronger.

P:The Terminator is one of a growing number of villains I feel who we've gotten to know so well that they've become sympathetic.

M:Interestingly enough I've never seen him as a villain, but as a mercenary, who had to take on a job for a specific reason. Otherwise he would never have met the Teen Titans. He has no personal animosity against them, He couldn't care less about them. Unfortunately his son got involved and he had to take on the job as a matter of honour. Consequently I never saw him as a villain.

I see Baron Blood as a terrible, horrible villain. A brilliant conception and I love the character. Jim Baikie has done a Baron Blood special which has been in the offices for about a year. This is the origin. Who is he? Where did he come from? What are his abilities? What's it all about? It'll all be explained

I introduced Cheshire recently, and she s the Terminator without any of the moral compunctions that the real Terminator has. She also has the sidekick, the Chinese man who trained her, as Terminator has Wintergreen. There was a deliberate parallel created there which I don't think any readers have spotted yet.

P:I thought that the New Teen Titans started off as just a normal all-action team book.

M:The first 6½ issues are standard. We had all the concepts and characters, but when Cyborg met his father at the end of number 7 the book changed tenor for both George and me. George was a little worried that Cyborg was the standard black character in comics, but when I told him where I was going he understood. I wanted Victor to start angry and then very quickly realise that he was angry with himself, not the whole world. The next issue,"A Day in the Life" carried on in that new direction and then it took off with the Doom Patrol story. It's a matter of feeling out your characters, understanding the limits of your characters, and it takes a while. Look at the first 10 issues of the Fantastic Four. All the concepts are there but it s only the beginning and you can see that they're struggling to find out how to handle it. It was the same with us. It was then that we realised that we didn't have to do action as the whole concept. We could do characters as well. Number 8 was the first issue we co-plotted, and it worked so well I'm surprised that we didn't do it again for a long time. Another thing that helped us realise we didn't have to do just action was the reader reaction. We got a lot of mail saying they liked the characters talking as well

P:When did the real team-up between you and George begin then?

M:We did 6 & 8 together, but it was issue 38 (Who is Donna Troy?) when we started to co-plot everything. You must remember that I would structure a story, but George was free to make changes, which he did. I don't want to minimalise his contribution to these early issues at all. I may have produced most of the plot, but he paced the book and added sequences when needed. I don't want to give any indication that George wasn't a full partner from

the beginning. It was just that later on we made it official.

P:You created Terra to be destroyed

M:Everyone used to compare us to the X-Men in the very beginning, and when Kitty Pryde joined them they set everything up for me perfectly. The readers just assumed that we had copied her, but I knew better. Everyone at DC knew better too, since I had told them the plotline beforehand. Somehow the news never leaked out to the fans, which is unusual I was using the fans in this particular case - they thought that anyone who was cute could never be a villainess. So it was a beautiful situation as far as I was concerned, where I could take all the fan prejudices and all the fan expectations, play it exactly the way they expected it, then suddenly in number 34 you see her in the long gown, smoking a cigarette, obviously having done something with the Terminator. It was then that the fans realised it had all been a set-up. But I kept her copy to speech balloons only, no thought balloons, so that the Teen Titans, and hence the reader, thought that she was having second thoughts and getting nicer. She was purely a case of me manipulating the readers where I wanted them to go. George and I had a lot of fun with it.

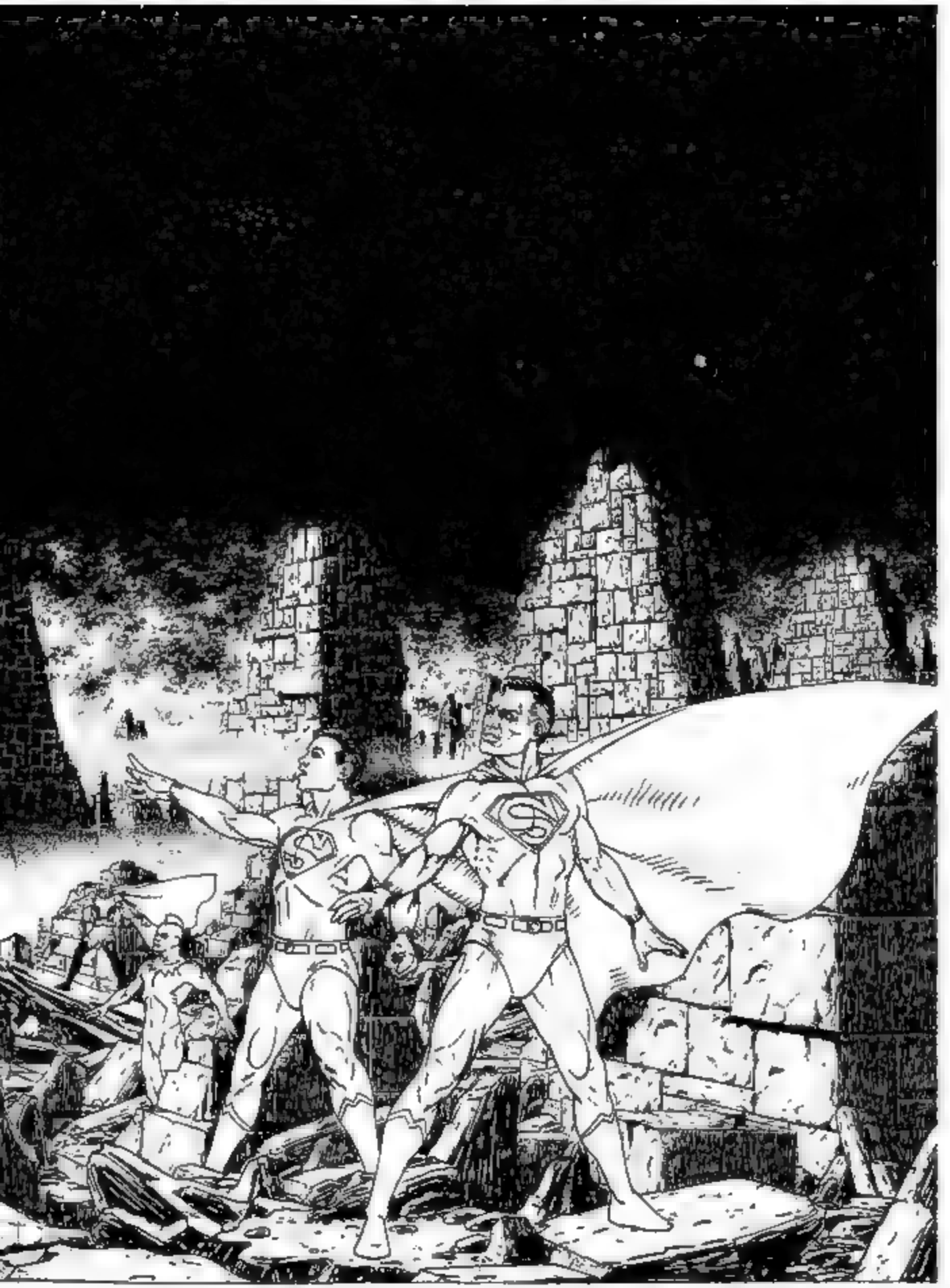
I mislead and manipulate the reader all the time. It's something all writers should do because if you don't fool the reader he doesn't need you. You have to keep attacking the reader's sensibilities otherwise they become complacent. If they become complacent they don't care. What you have to do is make them angry at you all the time. Not angry enough to put the book down, but to keep their interest.

P:I must admit that I got a bit angry with the Talus of the New Teen Titans book, before it went reprint, because of the loss of George and the constant fill-ins.

M Any one of those artists would have been fine if they had done the whole run. I don't think the book worked as well. Not only was there the loss of George, therefore I had to re-adapt to doing all the plotwork myself, which was hard, but I was also starting Crisis. I am not all that satisfied with the end result, but there were a couple I liked, especially the Terminator ending

Christopher Williams '86

Christopher Williams '88



P:Eduardo Barretto has taken over the Teen Titans
M:Yes. It's taken him 5 issues to get used to all the characters but he a doing the best work of his life now. We'll never work the way George and I did because a) they re my characters b) I m writing full scripts for Eduardo, and most importantly c) Eduardo has moved to Uruguay, so it'd be very difficult for him to do it other than with a full script
P:What is the new book, Titans Spotlight about?
M:It has stories about individual Titans. It s a bit like doing a mini-series for each, only all the stories won't have to be 4 issues long. All mini-series have to be 4 issues long now because you can't get it past Canadian postal regulations otherwise. It has to be quarterly or else there's all kinds of strange taxes you have to pay. The problem is that not every story you come up with is good for 4 issues. 3 issues is a good length because every story has a beginning, middle and end, but 4 is an artificial length that is hard as hell to write. DC wanted another Teen Titans book but I said I didn't have many 4 issue stories. Paul Levitz came up with the idea of putting all the stories in one book, whether the stories are 1 issue long or 5 issues. I'm hoping to use a lot of different artists on the book.
P:Different artists could create different atmospheres to compliment the story
M:Yes It also gives me the chance to work with artists I've wanted to work with for a long time now. I asked Steve Dillon what sort of story he would like to draw and he said romance, so I'm writing a romance story for him, with Jericho, where they can only communicate by sign language.
P:Every now and again there are announcements of a Teen Titans movie on the way.
M:During the first few years of the Teen Titans there was a lot of interest in making a movie from a lot of companies, and I got so worked up about them that I was almost spending the money that I was going to get from them. In no case did any ever go through, or money change hands. Jenette did mention that there is interest at present, and that it's good, but I've heard it all before. I'll believe it when I see it up on the screen and not before. I know from the past 6 years at Marvel and DC that signing contracts means nothing Steven Spielberg signed Blackhawks, and I believe money changed hands, but the movie will not come to pass
P:Do you own the characters you create?
M:I own nothing I get a percentage of the merchandising, creators royalties on anything I've created and a royalty on the comic sales, but DC own the copyright. Simply put, DC own everything.
P Crisis started as a letter to you in Green Lantern 7 years ago.
M Yes. It mentioned a problem with DC continuity and my answer was that maybe we should fix up DC continuity
P But it really started while you were waiting for Len Wein one day.
M:Len is known for being late. If he were God the human race wouldn t be created for another 50 million years. He's never been on time in his life. I'm early on the other hand. So there I was waiting and waiting. The train that was supposed to get us down to the convention leaves. Finally he and Joe Staton arrived and we left. While I had been waiting I had thought up the whole concept of Crisis, and when I described it to Len he just loved it straight away. The 3 of us were talking about it right the way through the con. I don't remember this at all but Laurie Sutton, who was an editor at Marvel, was at the con too, and she was in on one of our conversations. Supposedly, a couple of months ago the people at Marvel were complaining that Crisis was obviously a rip-off of Secret Wars, but Laurie spoke up and told them that we'd really thought of it 5 years ago.
P:I was discussing this sort of plagiarism thing with Jenette Kahn, and I ve always thought it was a pity that DC have these great ideas but Marvel always brings it out first.
M What happens is that DC will announce something and then Marvel, who seem to have a crying need to be first, will rush their stuff into print. DC announced the hardcover/softcover idea over a year before we actually did it so that the dealers, distributors and fans knew well in advance. One month before we actually started printing the softcover versions, Marvel rushed Dreadstar and Co into press claiming that they came up with the idea first. That's ridiculous. Of course they didn't. The dealers were angry. I was at a distributors meeting where a lot of them attacked Marvel for it, because they had stockpiled the baxter books assuming there would never be a reprint, whereas they didn't have to overstock the DC books. Jim Shooter claims to have invented the mini-series. DC did Worlds of Krypton 3 or 4 years before Marvel did their first one. I don't care who came up with the idea but in that case all Jim can do is say he came up with it We've announced everything in the press beforehand so all you have to do is check up to find out who did it first.
P What about Man Thing and Swamp Thing?
M That was purely coincidence. Joe Orlando at DC & Roy Thomas at Marvel were both fans of The Heap Joe talked to Len about a Heap-like story. Roy Thomas independantly talked to Gerry Conway about doing a Heap-like story. The strange thing is that Len and Gerry were room-mates then and they didn't know they were both working on the same type of story at the same time. If anything, Swamp Thing was created as a one-shot mystery story while Man Thing was created as a series
P Why was Crisis delayed for so long?
M We delayed it first for Peter Sanderson to research it, which took over 2 years, then we had other problems which I can't go into, and then we finally delayed it for the 50th anniversary.
P Was George the first choice for Crisis?
M:George is <u>always</u> my first choice, but not in this case because he was doing Teen Titans. I mentioned Crisis to George the week after the con and he said he'd do it. Then he didn't want to do it. Then he finally said he would. All this over a 2 year period. My view was that George wouldn't really want to do it because for this type of story the artwork had to be totally subliminal to the story-line. The artwork only served the story, and when George did Crisis he improved it 100% in my view.
P But unfortunately the first issue came out in flexographic.
M:Yes, unfortunately.
P:I've heard a lot of editors say how good it can be, but I've yet to see a good copy.
M:I've got a copy done in Flexographic that's gorgeous. The first problem was that it took the printers over a year to figure out how to hold down the plates correctly so that they don't move, which is why you have a lot of off-register stuff. Secondly, because of the way it's done you need to change the plates every 80,000 copies, maybe even less. There s not a lot of quality control at the printers and they try to squeeze 100,000 or 120,000 out, and so you get all those bad copies. The printers don't care because more plates means more money

It was very funny when Crisis 1 came out. George calls me up and tells me how bad the printing is, and I don't know what he's talking about because my copy is gorgeous. We get sent 10 copies directly from the printers. I quickly ran down to my local comic shop, bought a copy, and rang George back to say he was right. I went into the DC offices and showed them what was being sold. The printers had sent the best copies to the offices, George and I. So flexographic can be done well it's just a matter of quality control and making sure they change the plates. So we took Crisis off flexographic.
P:Of course you realise that because DC have had cross-overs with Marvel, you ve effectively destroyed the Marvel universe?
M Oh sure. I did it in one panel of the Titans/ Crisis crossover I told Chris Claremont and he said,"Shucks "
P Were there any characters you killed off that you didn't want to?
M:I agreed with all the choices that were made, though I was sorry to kill off The Flash. I refused to kill off a few, but they didn't die anyway, so that doesn't matter. I didn't really have the power to kill off anyone because I m only a freelance writer. The deathlist was suggested and approved by the people up at DC, and I usually followed what they asked me to do.
P Were you surprised at how large the deathlist was?
M:Very much so. And gratified too that the company was willing to have an incredibly good spring clean, and they weren't holding back. It indicated that they were interested in revitalising the company, and not sticking with old, worn-out concepts.
P:The whole purpose is to streamline DC, but what effect will it have?
M:It'll make it easier to read. It'll be easier to

Williams 1986

do cross-overs. It's more of a philosophical difference than an actual difference. It will suddenly force all the writers to think of the DC universe as one, as opposed to being different sovereign states.

P:Crisis leads into The History of the DC Universe which will have text by you and illustrations by George. What is that about?

M:Essentially it s a primer of the DC characters from the dawn of time to the end of time. It s a 1-issue history book We were originally going to put this in as the last few issues of Crisis, but the story kept expanding so we never had any space for the history. We had to have a story to lead up to the change, to explain it, then we had to say what the change was.

P There'll be new characters in the DC universe too the new Dr Light and Wildcat, the Charlton characters. What plans are there for these?

M:There'll be books for Blue Beetle and Captain Atom, and a lot of the other Charlton characters will be appearing in the DC weekly. That'll be very similiar to the British comics that you have, only it'll be American comic book size. It'll have 8/9 page continuing stories, with a few pages of news A weekly comic has never been done in the States before. The nearest we got was Captain Marvel in the 40s which came out fortnightly. Technically Spiderman is a weekly, and Batman is fortnightly because they have continuing stories.

P:You ll be writing Superman in Action, with Jerry Ordway drawing. It seems to me that a lot of characters are being changed back to how they originally appeared all those years ago.

M I think that the further away you get from the impetus that creates a character, the thing that makes the character popular, the more you dilute the character. The 50s Superman, in a very logical effort to keep things exciting, kept getting stronger. They were searching for a new formula to use on him. It was very difficult because he had 7 comics about him in one fashion or another. Superman became more powerful as they tried to do bigger and better things, but the character got lost in there. In the early days Superman was a very vital character

P:It was also very quickly paced, whereas now it has slowed down a lot.

M.Yes, it's slowed down tremendously. I've been pushing for Superman to return to the 40s version since I was on the DC staff and I used to go to the library and read all the early issues. Most of the people of my age remember the Mort Weisenger period and any fan feeling was towards those. I've always liked Superman but I never realised how vital a character he was until I read those early issues We won't be able to change a lot We'll still fly instead of leaping tall buildings, and we'll limit his powers The attitude will change more than anything else.

P John Byrne will be writing/drawing Superman. Will you be working closely with him?

M:Yes. When I contacted John and found that we both thought that the best Superman was:the first few years by Seigel and Shuster; the Max Fliescher cartoons; and the Christopher Reeve characterisations, then I knew we were both thinking of the same Superman. However, I had specific ideas for Luthor. Even though John will introduce the character, he will be my Luthor. He has no relationship with any other Luthor you have ever seen before. John and I both saw Luthor in exactly the same light, which was amazing. The one fact we both agreed on before we went into it was that Luthor does not hate Superman because he made him bald as a kid. In fact there was no Superboy, and he became Superman as an adult, as in the Seigel and Shuster days. Luthor hates Superman because Luthor was the best before Superman came along. John and I had that same feeling for the character, and Alan Moore too (in DC Presents).

P:Alan said that the real Luthor would come to Metropolis and be able to destroy Superman in a few logical steps.

M:Yes. However the one thing I worked out which John and Alan haven't mentioned yet was Luthor's background, where he stands in Metropolis, and what his circumstances were. My participation in the whole Superman project was solely based on whether my Luthor would be included or not. I never told anyone that, but if John had not liked my Luthor I would not have done Action. But he did, and I'm happy to be in on the project.

P:It sounds as though Luthor is a very major character in this new Superman.

M He's vital to the series. He's the linch-pin for the series. ●

by Pete Scott

With the Rocketeer graphic novel Dave Stevens takes a giant step forward into the past, creating in the process a book that will appeal not just to a nostalgia-prone America, but to adventure-lovers of all ages. Drawing his inspiration from the old Commando Cody and King of the Rocket Men movie serials, he explores the full vocabulary of comics, catering as much for character development as for spills and thrills. There are a few incongruities and anachronisms scattered around, but the story is told with relish, humour and dazzling efficiency In fact it's so well-realised that Stevens emerges as a comic strip whiz-master of the first water.

The Rocketeer may be a farrago of ideas, but it's a potent one Set in the 1930s, the only era in which such a story would seem plausible, it is aimed primarily (I would guess) at male teenagers, for whom both girls and the power of flight exist in a parallel universe. A 200mph rocket pack, on the other hand, is a potent image likely to make both dreams come true. And it is just such a rocket pack that young aviator Cliff Secord finds hidden in the cockpit of his experimental 'Blind Bulldog' aeroplane one fateful morning in 1938 Secord is anxious to make money in order to impress his girlfriend Betty. To this end he decides to keep the rocket pack and cash in on it (much as Peter Parker initially planned to exploit his own superpowers). His first move is to enlist the aid of mechanic Ambrose Peabody - aka Peevey - who constructs for him a makeshift flying helmet-cum-mask. Secord then appears in the rocket pack at Bigelow's Flying Circus, a daredevil air show of the type popular in the 30s. Inevitably the sight of a flying man, tricked out in a flame-belching jet-pack, attracts a good deal of attention, and it isn't long before Secord is being pursued by two opposing factions, the FBI and a group of Nazi spies. Not to mention the rocket pack's rightful owner... At this point the plot becomes a welter of pursuit and counter-pursuit, as loads of old-time cars and planes roar through chase after chase

In synopsis the plot may appear slight, and indeed it is. But it's written with enough brio to disguise its lack of substance. Moreover, the sheer quality of Stevens' 'rotogravure' drawings more than compensates for any other shortcomings His nostalgia-drenched pages are so enjoyable to look at that the plot doesn't matter too much unless one tries to analyse it afterwards. What really counts is the mood, the ambience, the essence of a bygone era, crystallised to perfection in Stevens' artwork.

In addition to his flair for authentic 30s paraphernalia Stevens is also a first-rate 'good girl' artist. His 'cute little numbers' are in the finest tradition of American glamour illustration. This aspect of his talent is displayed to good effect in the Rocketeer graphic novel. In fact, the pages featuring Secord's girlfriend Betty are among the book's major attractions. Betty is based, as Harlan Ellison points out in his otherwise disposable intro (which is full of STUPID post-literate DRIVEL like "Don't matter no whichway"), on 50s bondage queen Bette Page. A smiling wholesome beauty, her attractions - to both Secord and the reader - are enhanced by her inaccessibility. Time and again we see her removing her clothes, lounging in her undies or posing prettily with her legs braced and bottom out-thrust. Her occupation as a model for "art photos" allows Stevens plenty of leeway for suggestive artwork and dialogue When she tells Secord "I'm going to be tied up this afternoon", the double meaning couldn't be more clear. (Parenthetically, The Rocketeer contains a couple of very nice bondage panels, replete with exposed stocking tops, etc)

The interplay between Betty and Secord is well-handled; so too is Secord's rapport with Peevey. All three emerge as fully-rounded characters, real and credible. Also along for the ride are Doc Savage and his henchmen, all of whom turn increasingly tetchy as the plot unfolds. The story consists in the main of reprint material, though Stevens has added seven new pages for good measure. These don't, as I'd initially hoped, resolve the Betty/Secord relationship. Instead they're shoehorned into the narrative at various points, adding depth to the characters or expanding selected action scenes. Less detailed than the already-published stuff, they nevertheless add something to the action. Jaime Hernandez apparently took a hand in drawing them, and though his contribution isn't glaringly obvious it adds to the overall veneer of quality. The storyline itself is disappointingly open-ended, but at least it leaves the way open for a sequel. Let's hope this won't be too long in coming.

Basically an old-fashioned aviator strip, the Rocketeer contains all the necessary ingredients of the genre and more besides (including several panels of superb 'good dog' artwork). I have nothing but praise to bestow on Dave Stevens for fashioning such a warm, humorous, tautly impressive thriller. As a piece of atmospheric comic art it's a real winner. It may be years before ol' slowpoke Stevens is able to complete a follow-up, but I m confident that the present volume will sustain his reputation until then. It really is that good.●

Speakeasy 67 from Acme Press Ltd
40p. £5 for 13 issues

SE has become far more up-market with two-colour cover, better layout, and previews of the top stuff. But it totally lacks personality. The interviews with Joe Staton and Julius Schwartz this issue could have just been in the news section without much difference. That's the problem, it has no depth. The Watchmen preview is much better and delves into the subject.(Did you notice how the only face we see of the Watchmen is Rorschach's, who hasn t got a face anyway?) More of this sort of stuff please

The value for money is very questionable too when you consider what a high print run this has 8½ of the 32 pages were ads, which means you're paying 40p for 23½pages American sized pages too.

ALAN DAVIS

Alan Davis has a clear attractive style that has evolved over the few years that he has been a professional. An interesting aspect of his work is the way he subtlely exaggerates the figures, turning them into slight caricatures. Yet they remain surprisingly realistic. A cubist comic artist?

Alan is perhaps the nearest we have in Britain to the ideal American superhero artist, so it's no surprise that he's now working for the Americans full-time. Adventures of the Outsiders, Batman, New Mutants Annual. The mind boggles at what he'll do in the future.

This interview was conducted by Lee Chester, who knows everything there is to know about Alan and his work. I updated the interview recently.

Paul

Lee:When did you first start to draw?

Alan:For as long as I can remember. I was always better at drawing than anything else. I wasn't academic when I was younger, I was the slow one of the family. If drawing was the thing you were better at than everybody else, then you do it. Obviously with comics around, you copy comics.

L:So you were always drawing heroes?

A:Well no, I was really interested in science fiction, monsters and, more importantly early on, I was into archaeology and mythology, so I used to draw and make model dinosaurs and that sort of thing. I don't think I was ever interested in actually creating heroes until I got older then I started evolving characters like Boots n Glove.

L:Did you read any SF apart from comics?

A:When I read comics, I never 'read' comics because I was dying to find out what happened next issue; I'd go into a comic shop and be taken by the artwork. I probably missed tons of brilliant comics stories simply because I didn't like the artist. Even when I was younger I preferred to read novels for stories. I went through all the Edgar Rice Burroughs stuff - like everyone else - John Carter, Venus, Pellucidar etc, & I've read all the more popular SF at one time or another

L:I'd guessed you liked Burroughs...

A:It was the age I was at, I wasn't really old enough to understand the concepts of mainstream science fiction, I was into the lowest common denominator science fiction like Star Trek...where there was action and monsters.

L:Sometime quite early in 1979 you ordered a book called 'How to draw comics the Marvel way' from Mike Conroy, and Mike wrote you a letter on a letterhead which was a beautiful piece of Brian Lewis artwork You replied to Mike and we got interested in you because of the illustration you put on your letter. At the time we were looking for art for a letterzine called Fantasy Forum

A:My reply was a short 'Thank you' letter which I couldn't pad out in any way, so I thought I'd put

Above and over: From Alan's pre-comics portfolio.

a drawing down the side of my notepaper so the thank you wouldn't look so inadequate. When I sent that illustration, I never thought that anything would come of it. Mike thought it was printed, he thought it was my letterhead. He phoned up and said 'could he have the original' and I said 'you've got the original.' That was how tidy my inking was in those days. The point I m making is that I wasn't sending it to Mike in the hope of triggering off something, at that time I didn't even know fanzines existed.

L:Mike showed the illo to me and asked me what I thought, and asked me to write to you to get some more stuff out of you. You then started sending stuff in and your first illo was printed in Fantasy Forum 5.

A:That was more of an illustrative style, because what I was doing at that time was illustrative artwork. I didn't want to be a comic artist. I wanted to do book covers and portfolios and all the stuff that everyone else seemed to be doing at the time.

L Which artists have influenced you?

A:Do you really have to ask?

L:Neal Adams.

A Neal Adams, yes, Gil Kane, Frank Bellamy, Jack Kirby, etc, etc.

L:Apart from sending us spot illos, you also did a thing called 'Casting the Superheroes ', with Morecambe and Wise as Batman and Robin, Lee Marvin as Captain America, Clint Eastwood as Wolverine etc, and that went down really well

A:There was one that wasn't used, Burt Reynolds as Superman, which Mike actually asked for, but it was so horrendous he never used it.

L:Because of all this, and because you d been down to London to see us and shown us an incredible stack of work, not just illustrations but strips and everything, we were very impressed and thought that you should be doing some professional work We asked you to come down to the 1980 Marvelcon and the idea was that we d parade you in front of various editors and say give this guy some work . First of all we went to Richard Burton (who was Assistant Editor of 2000AD) but he didn t have anything to offer, though he was quite impressed by your work You were then introduced to Paul Neary who was Art Editor of British Marvel and he presumably thought that you showed promise. What happened then?

A:Paul passed me on to Alan McKenzie and Alan was meant to be giving me some Night Raven stuff, but that never happened for some reason. Then when

I got back onto Paul he said to do some covers which is where the Marvel Action cover (No.1) came from.

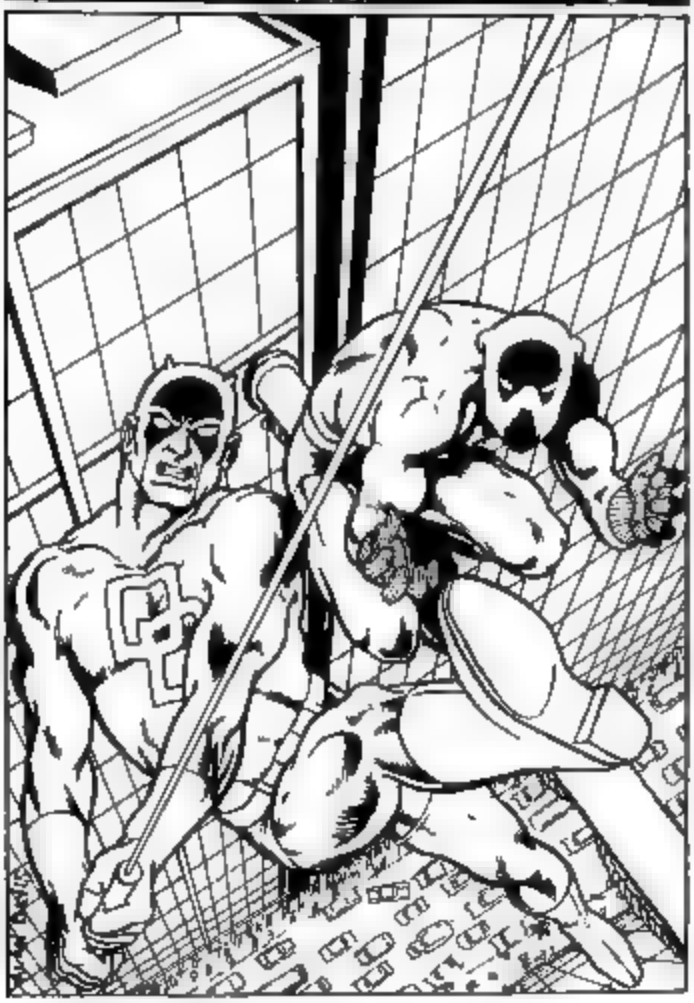
L:I remember picking that up in April 1981 when I was on holiday. It was instantly recognisable as yours, with Thor, Dr Strange and the Fantastic Four all in your style

A I'd done two covers, one of which wasn't used because it wasn't a 'cover . Paul told me it was a nice piece of artwork but it wasn t a cover so it wasn't used. After that I went down to Marvel and Paul had given me a science fiction story that he'd started writing. It was basically to do with a space warp and people coming through it. I wanted to do science fiction; I didn't want to do superhero stuff, I wasn't interested in superheroes at all. I drew one page of that and some character designs and passed them on to Paul. It was all very earnest and I was thinking it was going to be the best thing ever, but it just sort of faded away. When I went down to Marvel the next time Paul said,'How do you feel about doing Captain Britain?' I was totally repelled by the idea but he said we were going to do something really different I'd seen the original Captain Britain (Trimpe, Buscema etc) and I hated the costume, and when I said that, Paul said 'redesign the costume' so I did. Dave Thorpe was the scripter, and it was really the first time I'd ever worked on a script. I'd done stuff for myself before and it was pretty tacky but that was the first script I'd ever seen, it was also Dave Thorpe's first script. We were both like budding amateurs being paid to create a professional fanzine.

L:This was the autumn of 1981. How did your artistic style progress then?

A:I didn't know anything about storytelling techniques, I knew nothing about the way dialogue should be used, I didn't even know where space should be left for dialogue. The original episode had to be cut up to make room for the dialogue because I hada t left enough room. I'd done 1½-up artwork and left the same space as same-size artwork for the dialogue So when the art was reduced there wasn't enough room Some fairly major things at the beginning; apart from artistic styles, I didn t know how to use a brush, I didn t know which sort of pens to use. All I had used was Rotring pens, really very primitive, but Paul had said 'start using this and that', just to get familiar with it. Not saying,'use that all the time' but just 'try it out'.

L:So really we have to thank Paul for helping you develop



A:If Paul hadn't been pushing me to a certain extent I don't think I d have even bothered experimenting or anything. He gave me the encouragement to try everything out. I owe Paul a tremendous amount because apart from actually giving me my first break he also tried to get me work elsewhere. Like, Paul pushed Dez ((Skinn)) about getting me to work on Warrior. He also put in a good word for me with 2000AD, Marvel US, and DC at various times over the years.

L Recently during the Captain Britain run you started co-scripting Had you ever scripted before?

A:That's since Alan Moore went off it. I did write a Captain Britain story once that Paul Neary did the dialogue on because we were having problems with the scripting.

L That was 'Attack of the Binary Beings'.((Marvel Super-Heroes 385))

A:That's right What happened was that I'd seen that there was going to be a hell of a lot of problems because of the way I was getting scripts. There were delays and I just had the feeling that things weren't going right. At the time I was only working on Captain Britain so I took the chance and did a one-off Captain Britain story. I'd written the script for it and I took it down to Paul, Paul thought the script wasn t up to much - the dialogue part of it - so he re-dialogued it, but it was only because we didn't want to have one issue of Marvel Super-Heroes come out without Captain Britain.

L:While working on Captain Britain you did a couple of Star Wars episodes. Alan Moore wrote one of them.

A:Steve Moore wrote the other - 'Dark Knight's Deviltry'. I was offered them because Paul was trying to get me as much work as possible so that I could go full-time, because at that time I was still working in my factory job and I was only doing Captain Britain as a hobby Paul wanted me to be a full-time comic artist 'Dark Knight s Deviltry' was, I think, 15 pages and Paul gave me that when I was on the 2nd or 3rd episode of Captain Britain; it was the biggest thing I d ever been offered and I was totally flabbergasted at working with someone like Steve Moore - obviously I knew all about Steve Moore When I started working with Alan Moore, he wasn't *ALAN MOORE* then, but working with Steve Moore was a really big thing because I d seen so much of his work. I was told that I'd have a couple of months

Top Left and Above: Alan's first accepted and rejected covers respectively. Top Right: Clint Eastwood as Wolverine.

-THIS MONEY THEY WERE AFTER IT'S NOT REAL MONEY!
THEN WHY WOULD THEY AND THE DRUNK ONES WANT IT SO BADLY?
I DON'T KNOW BUT TH S OLD POSTER WHAT ON EARTH DOES IT SAY? DOESN'T MAKE SENSE!
BRITISH NATIONAL PARTY
KEEP THE
UNLESS SOMETHING'S GONE VERY WRONG, INDEED!

Above is the original artwork for the last few panels of the first episode of the new Captain Britain (Sept. 1981) and at left is the art as it was printed, with the addition of tone and dialogue. The face in the poster in the original version may be familiar to some of you (I see it every time I get near a mirror), but Paul Neary voted that little in-joke and substituted the extremely unsubtle Hitler look-alike on the left.

Artwork copyright Marvel Comics Ltd., 1981.
Many thanks to Alan Davis (for everything).
LCB

to do it but the deadline was moved up and I only had a couple of weeks to do it, so I had to really churn it out. It was a ridiculous pace; I was doing something like 3 pages a day when I was just starting out, pencils and inks. 'Rust Never Sleeps' was a little bit more leisurely and that was the Alan Moore one - I think that was a bit of a disaster, for lots of reasons. After the two Star Wars episodes, I carried on with Captain Britain and I was doing all these posters.

L There's a hell of a lot

A Yeah. I didn't go full-time until I was working on Captain Britain, Marvelman and Harry Twenty all at once. I had to know for definite that I could afford to support my wife and kids so it was a case of making sure I had enough work, but at the time I was doing only Captain Britain, Paul was trying to give me as much work and experience as possible by letting me do colour stuff. I was experimenting with coloured inks and getting advice all the time, so I was really fortunate that I had someone who criticised me constructively and didn't try to hammer me down; he let me make mistakes and learn from them.

L Did you work in the Marvel offices at all?

A:No, I'd send Paul photostats of pencils, photostats of inks, then colour something and take it in and show him, and he'd tell me where I went wrong. I don t think I ever did anything so wrong that it wasn't printable, so the history of my development is in print from Marvel Super-Heroes 377 onwards.

L:On the first episode of Captain Britain, the original art for the final panel had Captain Britain looking at a poster with my face on it which didn't appear in the printed version; why was that?

A:The way that I'd drawn it, it looked like a National Front poster, and Paul was being very, very careful about this at the time because he didn't want to blow the British-originated material that he was trying to commission more of. He had Mick Austin doing Timemaster - Mick Austin started at the same time as me - and there was somebody else, which made three 'budding geniuses' under Paul's wing at the same time. Paul had plans to try and cultivate some new British talent but obviously that was all cut short when Marvel stopped doing most of their original material. Going back to the first Captain Britain, when people see the old material they say 'It's so cartoony', but when I was starting on the first Captain Britain I was told it should be a bit Will Eisner-y (I didn't even know of Will Eisner at the time, I'd never even heard of him) to be a bit like Eisner's Spirit, where you're meant to have a serious character who's got a cartoon character as a sidekick. The Spirit had Ebony and Captain Britain had Jackdaw, and the situations are very bizarre. We had the Crazy Gang, which was the original group of villains and everything else was meant to be completely crazy as Captain Britain was on an alternate Earth. It was meant to be deliberately British in that sense, to be fairly eccentric. But Paul felt that the poster suddenly struck a realistic note in what would otherwise have been a totally zany story. Paul decided that a caricature face of Hitler was preferable to what stood out as being a very realistic face - as you know it was! The realistic face would have given the ending an emphasis that it wasn't meant to have.

L:Dez Skinn at that time was trying to round up talent for Warrior .

A:Paul was taking stuff that I'd done to show Dez, and that was how I got to do the 3 pages of Marvelman in the Summer Special ((Warrior 4)). Steve Dillon did 4 of the 10 pages and Paul had 6 pages. He let me choose whether I did the 3 with Marvelman in the Antarctic, or the other 3 on the Moon. I did the 3 on the Moon because they were easier.

L:How did you get Harry Twenty on the High Rock?

A:I was doing Marvelman completely at that point because Garry Leach had decided that he couldn't cope with the deadlines. At the same meeting where I was asked to take over Marvelman on a regular basis, I met Richard Burton again and Richard had seen some of the stuff I'd been doing and asked me to call round at the 2000AD office. I went there with samples of my stuff, everything I had in print, and they said they'd get in touch with me. I thought that was that. The next thing I knew I was being offered Harry Twenty.

L:Harry Twenty has a different feel to it than the rest of your work.

A:I'd like to think that everything I did had a different feel. Though I do realise that as I've gone over the years my style has become more polarised. But when I originally started on Marvelman I tried to fit in with what Garry Leach had done, which might not feel a hardened comics fan but would look similiar to the general reader simply by having Letratone and stuff like that, so that there was a similiarity of weight and tone etc. Working on Harry Twenty I was really trying to get a style that suited the story as I saw it

L:Were you told what was wanted?

A:I was given the designs

L:I wondered how much editing you got

A:I've always been fairly lucky there. I think there were two panels edited on Harry Twenty; very slight things were changed. They were hardly noticable. I don't think I've ever been 'edited'.

L:Were you comfortable with the strip generally, with the story?

A:When I started on it I was given a lot of designs that Robin Smith ((Art Editor of 2000AD)) had done. He designed all the guards, the prison uniforms, and a very rough diagram of the High Rock. I also got a couple of character sketches by John Wathkin (who was originally meant to share the job). It was a little bit restricting because I thought I was going to work with someone, and had to follow their developments, so one of the things which is only of interest in retrospect was that when I got more freedom it was too late to change what had gone before. If I'd been told 'draw Harry Twenty as of now, the way you want it', I'd have most likely changed it a hell of a lot. It's easy to say that in retrospect with the amount of experience I got working on Harry Twenty. 107 pages produced at breakneck pace; now that I've done all that it's easy to look back and say 'this is what I should have done'.

L:You then teamed up with Alan Moore on a Time Twister, which was the first D R & Quinch

A:We'd already worked together on Captain Britain and Marvelman, so we didn't think we'd get to work together at 2000AD, because what effectively happened was that a writer and artist were working for 3 different companies all at the same time and it must be a first of some kind,

---

Left: Alan's letterhead. Right: A Night Raven illo.

The fact that Alan lives near me didn't have a lot to do with it, we just got on well together. We were both interested in characterisation.

L:You also had the opportunity to contribute to the plots.

A I m really a frustrated writer.

L Not any more

A:Still, I'd like to be able to do things that I'm just not competent to do. That aside, Alan knew that if he wrote a line of dialogue, I could draw the expression to match it, I could do the body language for it, and I knew that if I designed a character, Alan could fit the dialogue to suit that character So there was a ping-pong of ideas where I d give an idea to Alan and Alan would give an idea to me We worked really well and it was very fruitful. We got on well together and we encouraged eachother to be more productive.

L.Why a comedy?

A It never really started out like that I had said to Alan that I would like to attempt a humour strip and D R. & Quinch when it was originally written was a humour strip, but Steve ({McManus, Editor of 2000AD}) didn t want another humour strip because he had Ace Trucking Co. at the time, so the first D R & Quinch though written as a cartoon strip had to be drawn in a more realistic style than the later ones When I started on the D R & Quinch series proper I evolved the characters in a very cartoony style.

L:After the first D.R. & Quinch you and Alan did 'The Hyper-Historic Headbang . Presumably someone at 2000AD decided you two went well together.

A I think the reason I got that story, from what Steve McManus told me, was that Alan sent the script to 2000AD and Steve said he had trouble understanding it The script was pretty confusing. Steve said he didn't want to send it to an artist who didn't know Alan because he didn t know what he'd get back, but he thought I'd be able to understand it

L:Was the D R & Quinch series started because of reader reaction to the first episode?

A:I think once I'd drawn the first story of D.R & Quinch I knew they were going to carry on. The script was very funny in its own right, and when I d actually designed the characters and seen what they looked like I could see they weren't conventional characters in any sense

L:I think Quinch looks like you.

A:A lot of people say that! Robin Smith started it How you know why I don't like to be photographed. Anyway, when I designed D.R. & Quinch I knew they had something. There wasn't anything they could do that didn't look funny; they are inherently funny just because of their physical shapes If they just walked down the street it looked funny. A bit like Laurel & Hardy, you've got the fat one and the little one

and it's got that immediate humour.
L You told me earlier that Paul sent samples of your work to DC, which I'd been on at you about for ages.
A Dick Giordano came to Britain and attended a Society of Strip Illustrators meeting, and Paul had my work there and showed it to Dick. The only comment I know Dick made was that he thought I'd be ready in a couple of years, that I could draw but I wasn't experienced enough at that time. It was that English talent search by Dick that gave me my break on Harry Twenty when Brian Bolland and Dave Gibbons left 2000AD and made the space for me to get in.
L:There was a difference in quality between the artwork on Captain Britain and that on Marvelman for a few months. Can you explain why?
A:There is no difference when it's drawn, it's just that Marvel UK have totally screwed up my art. I don't want to have a go at Marvel UK - everyone else does that - but it went on for three months ((on 'Endgame','Funeral on Otherworld', and 'Bad Moon Rising)) and the art was totally destroyed; all the fine lines were bleached out. Things like the Moon disappeared from the background in 'Bad Moon Rising'. The thing that really annoys me is that I was promised that a disclaimer would be printed so that the reader would at least know that my standards hadn't dropped. Someone at Marvel decided that the disclaimer wasn't worth the effort and if they put it in they would probably make themselves look silly, to have to admit to not being able to do their jobs properly. To compound that insult - that is, being lied to - they then went ahead and printed fan letters that are having a go at me dropping my standards, which is total hypocrisy when you realise what the real reasons are. The printing went back to normal in later issues
L Why did you take over the scripting on Captain Britain?
A:Alan left the scripting but the strip still had to come out. We were hoping for other scriptwriting sources to work out which didn't, so I had to take over as an emergency measure.
L:Did you volunteer or were you asked to do it?
A When Alan left, I worked out the direction for Captain Britain and said to the Marvel UK editors 'I want to do this' and they said OK So I'd already plotted the direction for a number of stories and even pencilled up artwork before dialogue was written for it. The dialogue wasn't something I wanted to do because I didn't think I was competent enough to do it. It was just something that had to be done until such time as we could get someone to do it properly
L Would you like to do more writing?
A:I don't want to be a full-time writer. Though there are stories that I'd like to write for myself, when I get an idea and think 'I could make a story out of that' but they're things for the future. I'd like to be competent enough to write things the way I think they should be written. The Captain Britain was really desperation; we knew there was very little time, the first lot of re-writing and dialogue I did was done 2 days before it was due to be lettered. It was a rush job but we didn't have any other options.
L:You did the illos for Night Raven in a very different style, how did you pick that up?
A:Various people had done them and Bernie Jaye was in a bit of a bind and I said I d do them. Paul Neary had done them and I was really impressed with the style he used. He'd picked up old pulp-type novels and done these really weird illustrations. Some that he'd done were about 3 feet across and he'd just gone at it with a paintbrush, slapped it all on, then it was reduced to a minute spot illustration. What I tried to do was imitate that to a certain extent.
L:You picked up 2 Eagle Awards in 1984 for Best Artist and Best Character ((Captain Britain)), how did you feel when you heard your name called out?
A:I don t really like the public attention so I was ready to bottle out from having to stand up in front of people and do anything; I don't like that.
L:You looked stunned to me.
A:I like to keep a very low profile and I am easily embarrassed by anything like that. In some ways it's an acknowledgement but to say anything else would be knocking the Eagle Awards I don't believe in there being a 'best' or 'favourite' or anything like that in comics I don't think Howard Chaykin deserved half of what he got because what seems to happen is that someone does one good thing and they're given every award that can possibly be heaped upon them/it. Although Chaykin did deserve some of the awards there was a bit of overkill to the total neglect of some of the other good stuff that has been done. I don't see comics as having a 1st, 2nd, or 3rd system in it, I think it s very difficult to try and differentiate because what you re judging is style, and with style there isn't good or bad, or better and best, only different. I think it's true that the greatest compliment you can be given is more work, people putting their money where their mouth is, as opposed to giving you an award. Awards are fine, but for someone to actually say 'we're going to pay you to do something' Is a greater reward than anything else
L:You were going to do the Aquaman mini-series for DC. How did you get the offer of work?

A:I sent Dick Giordano samples - Captain Britain, Marvelman, D R. & Quinch, Harry Twenty etc,etc. Brian Bolland, Dave Gibbons, and Alan Moore were incessantly telling me that I should be working for the Americans. I sent packages of samples to Jim Shooter and Dick Giordano. I sent them off in a pessimistic way and didn't really expect a comment from anyone.

L:Why did you keep your Aquaman assignment as such a close secret?

A:I wasn't trying to be secretive about it but the way I maintain my interest and output in comics work is by not discussing what I'm about to do. That way, when I'm working on it, it's fresh to me. If I sit down and talk to someone for 3 or 4 hours about the work that I m going to do, by the time I come to do it, in my head I ve already done it. Whereas, if I don't talk to anyone about it, I just bottle it all up and when I sit down at the drawing board it's sort of a relief to get it out. It's a way of trying to leash the creative flow. If you sit round and talk to people about it, they influence you one way, someone else influences you another way, and you start thinking about options, better ways to do it etc. If you haven't discussed it with anyone, you're on your own and usually you go with the first thing that you think of and you're much more confident and fresh about it.

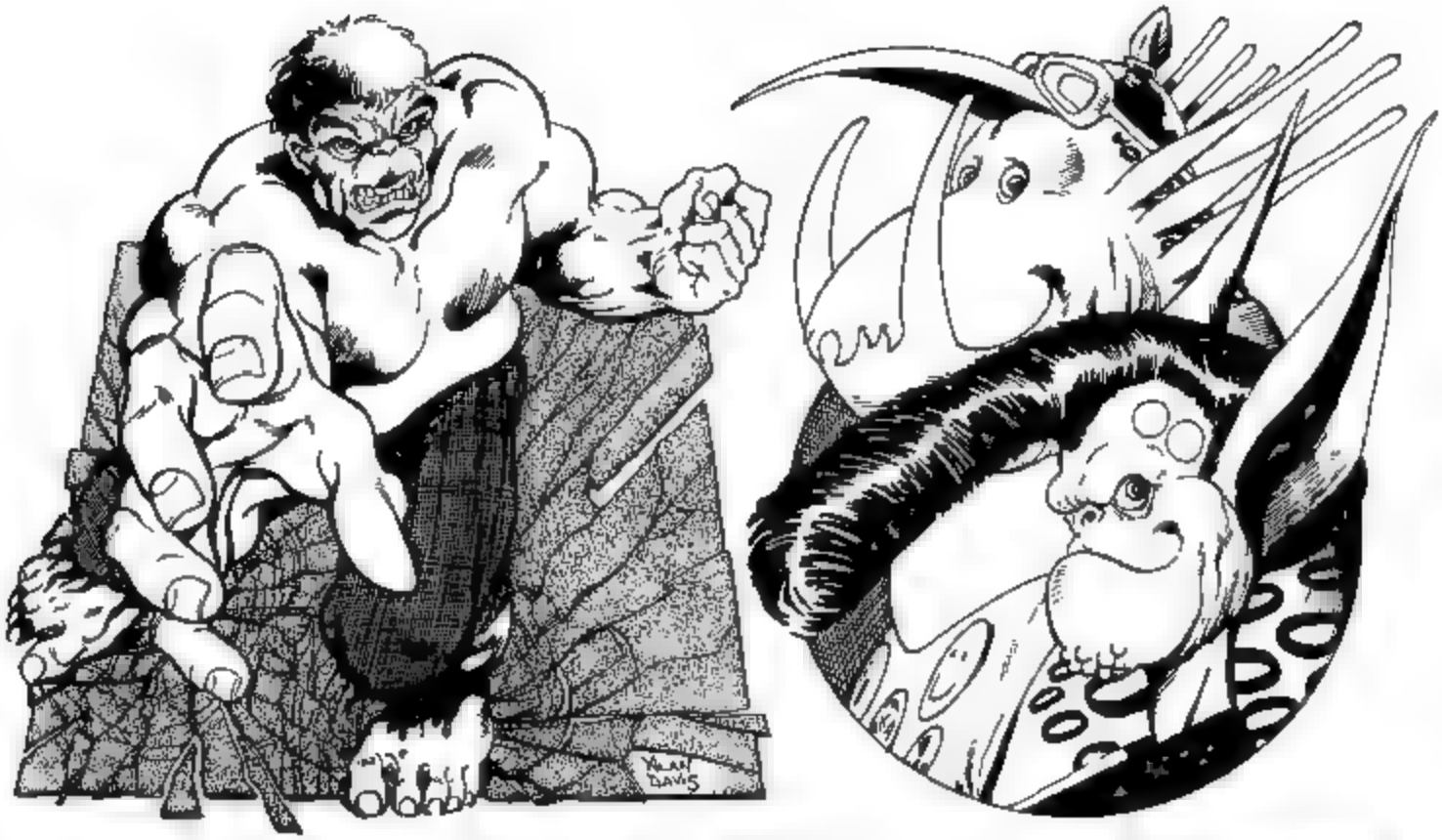
L:How did Dick Giordano approach you?

A He sent me a package of stuff, the first 3 scripts and a synopsis for the whole 4 parts, designs for the new costume; and he asked me whether I'd consider doing it. The most important thing about it was that it was in my own time. It was not a scheduled book and it meant I had the luxury of doing something for the American market without giving up my UK work. I wouldn't like to work exclusively for the Americans. I'd prefer to carry on doing bits and pieces all over the place because I enjoy doing lots of different things.

Just because I've been working for 3 different companies at the same time in the past doesn't mean it's the healthiest way to carry on. You're walking a really dodgy tightrope when you're working for a lot of different companies because each company expects you to be entirely devoted to them and in some ways they don't like you working for the competition. I've been really fortunate that I have been able to juggle 3 companies all at once.

L:Is there anything scheduled for you at 2000AD?

A:No, but I'd like to do some more work for them. I like working on a weekly. There are different disciplines needed for working on a monthly magazine than working on a weekly. There s a different storytelling flow. Most of the stuff I m working on is monthly and there's a long gap between things coming out, but when I'm working for 2000AD I've got 20-25 pages a month coming out in weekly instalments. It's very concentrated work with a quicker feedback I've been treated really well on 2000AD, apart from anything else. If you go into an environment where it's a good work situation and you get on with the people, people don t mess you around, it's good. Robin Smith has been a great help to me. He gave me all sorts of advice. My current modus operandi is based on Robin's advice. Before I went to 2000AD I used to do a page a day, pencils and inks, which meant that one day I could have the page done in no time and the next day I d be up to the early hours of the following morning trying to finish a page. Now what I do is more of a production-line method where I do the breakdowns, then the pencils, for the whole job, then I ink it all up and the inking's done in various stages, all the fine lines, all the faces all the hands, depending on how I feel about it By doing it in stages you spread it out across the week and it keeps it looking more consistant. The way I used to do it, if I had an off day it was a bad page. Robin helped me with a lot of the deadline disciplines.



L When we were talking about how you first started, you said you weren't really interested in doing comics What do you want to do in the future?

A:I don't really know I don't really see myself as being forever a comic artist,because I've seen the way artists get clapped out and start doing jobs just for money You've seen artists that peak out and start going downhill and are getting paid for their name and what they were capable of - it must be very easy to do that if people are willing to pay you for doing next to nothing.

L People will always pay hacks because there a always work that needs doing and spaces that need filling

A.At the moment I have the luxury of not being like that, but I d hate to be so desperate for money to have to resort to it. Comics always have the same basic structure and the style thing can be learned or changed reliability is the main thing and I suppose most hacks are reliable, I really don't know what I ll do in the future. Maybe go back to labouring in a warehouse

L.Do you have any advice you can pass on to aspiring artists?

A:All the advice I've got is what a been given to me One of the things that Paul Neary told me when I first started out was that he was always impressed by the way that Joe Kubert worked. It was 'do it and get it out, do it and get it out'. He wasn t a prima donna about making sure that every face was photographic or every line joined with another line. He was

Top Right. D.R. & Quinch T-Shirt design.

interested in getting the overall feel, a sort of spontaneity. When I first went down to Marvel I took all these Rotring pen illustrations, all stippled and shaded and every line was calculated and accurate. I even used drawing instruments to get them that accurate, I once used a template to make sure that the pupils and eyes were the same size. Paul said to me that nobody notices that, 'just churn it out'. Not churn it out in the sense 'be a hack', but don't worry about unnecessary detail, don't worry about the flowery stuff because people aren't interested in that. There is an element of fandom that is interested in detail but the majority of people that read comics read them for the story. As an artist you think people are going to love the clever stuff you're doing, but they don't even notice it. So the way to learn is to do it, chuck it out, working on the principle that, if you do 300 pages in a year, and 50 pages of that is 'good' stuff then it's 50 pages of good stuff. Whereas someone that is only doing one page every 2 or 3 days or a week, they're not going to have 50 pages of good stuff in a year, because they're still going to have a loss when some of their stuff doesn't work out, even if they do take a lot of time over it. I was never self-conscious about doing things wrong. Because I was under pressure, I had to churn it out at speed, so although some of the work has been sub-standard, it was all part of the learning process. Which is different to the situation where if I'd have had very little work and I'd stippled and shaded everything, and used tons of effort to cover up inadequacies, all the inadequacies are there

Above The original, realistic version of D.R & Quinch.

of the things I've enjoyed more than anything else about working in comics is to be able to sit down and talk with artists who enjoy drawing the same sort of things that I enjoy drawing and to exchange ideas with them at the same level. If I sit at home and talk to someone who is interested in art and I started to talk to them about 'comic art' in a very specific way, about the way that a certain brush holds ink, the way a certain brush doesn't hold its point and you can't draw certain shapes with it because of that, they think you're cracked because they're not interested in it. But when you can sit down and talk to another artist and they've got similiar experiences - and very few people have those experiences, it's a very small club - that's one of the best things, to actually have people tell you things because they've done it and they've been around for years and years and learned it all.

Paul:How much of the Aquaman mini-series did you complete and why did you drop it?

A I pencilled the first episode. Dick Giordano liked it and thought it demonstrated that I was right to fill in for Jim Aparo on Batman and the Outsiders. It had proved popular enough to get a companion Baxter book. Aquaman had always been one of my favourite childhood characters and I had been impressed by Batman and the Outsiders and followed it from the first issue so I really wanted to do both. I was still drawing Captain Britain and D R & Quinch so that was obviously too much work. Dick thought Batman and the Outsiders was a better career move since it was DC's third top seller and as such a better shop window. I took his advice. My pencils for the first issue of Aquaman were not used.

Opposite Top: Designs for the Aquaman mini-series. Above Right: Pre-lettered artwork for an upcoming issue of Adventures of the Outsiders, inked by Paul Neary.
Opposite Bottom: Judge Dredd character sheet.

P The finish on your artwork changed when you were working on both Batman and the Outsiders and Captain Britain. Was this down to working for colour or having to produce 36 pages a month?

A: 36 pages a month was a lot of work but I don't think it was so much that it made me lower my standards on the art. I just had to work longer hours. Incidentally, I was producing between 29 and 32 pages a month when I first started in comics. I was drawing 20 pages plus of Harry Twenty, 8 pages of Captain Britain and 6-7 pages of Marvelman (plus posters and covers) per month. That actually adds up to more than 36 pages a month but scheduling problems on Captain Britain and Marvelman gave me some slack and an occasional breather. I did have quite a bit of trouble adapting to American colour (and still do) because I am used to painted, tonal colour I've used in Britain. I think having to draw for American colour has affected the way I work but the main change has come through the natural evolution and streamlining of my style. I'm constantly experimenting. Trying to improve but quite often I'll make what I think is an improvement that, with the passing of time, I will realise is a real blunder. Unfortunately you can only improve by experience and in a printed medium it means all of your mistakes are public, permanent reminders that haunt you as you flick through back issues. My current (over the past year) aim is to simplify my style by using one accurate line rather than a lot of fudging. I realise from past experience that I might reverse this trend if I find another panacea. I experiment just as much with the layouts and storytelling but it's not as immediately apparent to the reader as using less lines or cross hatching is.

P Which matters most to you, story or art?

A Story. That's what comics are about.

Communicating the story to the reader. I take more time working on the continuity and flow of the action than any other aspect of the art. This really falls into the area of unseen work by the artist. Especially when working from a full script. The writer's description of what is in the panel is not always as visually explicit as he might think and little continuity jumps appear, so it's necessary to clarify and establish things

Above Left: Even without letters you can follow the story.
From Adventures of the Outsiders, inked by Paul Neary.

---

to ease the flow of the story. These changes don't affect the content of the story but they are necessary to make it work. I think the storytelling aspect of the artist is the most underestimated. Illustrative detail seems to be more impressive to certain elements of fandom than getting the basic storytelling right. They see detail and polish as good art.

P: The emphasis on Captain Britain changed when Alan Moore left. The stories became shorter and focused on Captain Britain. Why was this?

A: It was an editorial decision. Although the Jaspers epic would have made a good graphic novel, it had been criticised for being strung out as 8 page monthly instalments and for ignoring Captain Britain, the strips hero. If Captain Britain was to have his own magazine it was decided that he had to feature in self-contained stories, which could of course be connected by sub-plots or run over two issues, if each episode could stand as an individual story with loose ends to be concluded in the next issue.

P: Did this cause any problems?

A: The biggest problem was following the Jaspers epic. It had been packed with all sorts of aliens, cosmic beings, alternate dimensions, the end of the world and everything. This meant we had to tie any loose ends and start out in a new direction. That would obviously be more subdued. I thought the 'and everybody woke up and it had all been a dream' was too cliche and a bit twee. So once the replacement writer fell through I took on the writing for the last three issues of Mighty World of Marvel prior to the first Captain Britain Monthly, 'Bad Moon Rising', 'Tea and Sympathy', and 'And in all the Old Familiar Places'. The trilogy was intended to show the long-term effects of the Jaspers epic, reintroduce the cast and their environment in anticipation of the Captain Britain Monthly. (And of course each episode had to be a seperate story). It had already been decided that the first issue of Captain Britain Monthly should contain a reprint of the Captain Britain origin because it was going on sale on the States for the first time. Which is why it was necessary to clear the decks.

P: Both you and Jamie Delano were inexperienced

Above: The splash page of the last episode of Marvelman that Alan drew A good example of the cubist approach (the same figure from different angles) that Alan has to his art

win this art

Do you want to win the above page of art? Yes? Then send me a script for it, including the last panel, by September 1 and you could. Alan Davis drew the pg at a SSI Work In, and he ll judge which script is the best. It can be funny, serious or whatever. Alan will draw in the last panel of the winning script, and I ll print it when it's ready Please send all entries to the editorial address.

My thanks to Alan for his kind donation

Right: Marvelman, Harry Twenty
Captain Britain.

writers. Did this create any difficulties?

A: Inexperience was the main problem. I felt okay constructing the story but I never enjoyed writing the dialogue It always felt contrived and unconvincing. I think I also erred on the side of cramming too much stuff in and not editing myself. I think this is a common mistake for beginners. Jamie on the other hand is an excellent text writer and very good with dialogue. His problem was converting to the comics medium and pacing the visuals. I don't think our partnership really worked out and I'm dissatisfied with the majority of our Captain Britain Monthly work because it was produced in a compromise. As the series went on I took greater control in editing and rewriting the scripts, until I ended up writing the scripts for issues 13 and 14. Captain Britain 14 was another example of over-cramming an issue but I was trying to be fair to the fans by tying up all the loose ends because it was the final issue. We had very little warning that 14 was the final issue, the script and 13 pages of art had to be produced in less than two weeks.

P: What's happening to Captain Britain now, are you still involved?

A: I'm not sure. A US style colour comic was proposed but I don't know if it will come off. Captain Britain will however make a US colour appearance in the New Mutants Annual because Chris Claremont knew that I was really disappointed with the situation preventing my Captain Britain work being reprinted by Marvel So he wrote in a guest spot for Captain Britain. I think it's a really nice gesture.

P: Have you any connection with Marvelman now?

A: None. I gave all of my Marvelman character copyright to Garry Leach & Dez Skinn. (I still hold the copyright to my artwork and the visuals of the characters I designed). They've been screwed as much as I have but they thought they might recoup some of their losses by continuing Marvelman or selling their copyright. I wanted to be out of it. There was too much bitching and egotism. I'd made it quite clear to Dean Mullaney that I would not let him reprint my Marvelman art and refused to sign the necessary contracts for him to do so. Dez circulated a letter to everyone involved on my behalf stating my wishes. Eclipse went ahead regardless and used my artwork. I think I might be justified in saying my art was stolen because it was used without my permission, against my wishes and without any payment to me. But this is one of those grey areas where it's one man's word against another. It's down to who an individual wants to believe. Truth doesn't come into it. So I don't think my version of the facts will balance those who are more eloquent and can make theft sound like a noble cause to advance the comics medium

F Why has Paul Neary been inking Batman and the Outsiders/Adventures of the Outsiders, and how long will the partnership continue?

A: I'd originally agreed to pencil and ink 12 episodes of Batman and the Outsiders, so when Chris Claremont asked me to work with him I had told him I'd be free at the end of the 12 issue run. But there had been a misunderstanding at DC and they wanted me to do more. The only way I could do both was to use an inker on Batman and the Outsiders. I'd already given some thought to using an inker to allow me to be involved in more projects. I'd started to feel that inking is a bit like tracing over your own work. Doing it twice. I'm currently more interested in storytelling, doing the breakdowns. I'd already agreed to let Mark Farmer ink Captain Britain Monthly 14 (prior to knowing it was the final issue. It spoiled my track record for doing all the art on the new Captain Britain) and I was quite pleased with the results. So working with an inker was a valid option. I'd wanted to work with Paul for a long time and he liked the idea of inking my pencils, which is the best motivation of working together. I think the partnership has been very successful and it can only get better as we syncronise our efforts. We'll continue to work together on Detective and are currently doing character sketches and warm up drawings.

P: You've said you see more than one version of Batman. How will you approach Detective?

A: Yes, I see Batman the superhero who associates with superheroes, and Batman the darknight detective who is a loner. The Batman in Batman and the Outsiders was the superhero by virtue of being involved with powered beings in superheroic situations that govern his reactions and dilute his 'presence' which is his greatest weapon.

I do think that Mike Barr managed to put an amazing amount of the darknight characteristics into the Batman in Batman and the Outsiders especially in the solo action sequences. Most writers who have tackled Batman in a team book like the Justice League of America or even the Brave and Bold team-ups lost the essence of the real Batman. Mike is one of the few writers that allowed Batman to retain some integrity in the areas that I refer to as the superhero Batman, so I have extremely high hopes for the Detective scripts. My own view of Batman is that he is not insane. He is dedicated, obsessed. Batman isn't Bruce Wayne in disguise. Bruce Wayne has become a guise of Batman in the same way as Matches Malone. Wayne is just a way for Batman to move around in public. The 'city' is a major part of Batman It's like a horror film where, when we (everyday normal folk) go to bed all our worst fears come out to populate the night. It's the same environment we live in but it's distorted by the night and the bizarre characters into a surreal nightmare Batman can survive the insanity. His appearance and the effect it has on the cowardly criminal is his only edge and he knows how to use it. He is very theatrical Batman is fighting the evil forces that operate at night so he has become a creature of the night and that a where he is most effective. During the day he's just a costumed athlete who could be picked off by any casual sniper. If he needs to operate during the day he would wear a disguise and blend in with the crowd. I don't think my view of Batman is original. I see him as the traditional creature of the night facing the surreal villains that exist in parts of the city normal people never see.

P:Neal Adams asked you to pencil Megalith. His inks tend to swamp the pencils. Did this worry you?

A No, I'm a Neal Adams fan so I was chuffed by the offer and welcomed the opportunity to work with and learn from him. Unfortunately my commitments meant I wasn't able to accept his offer. It would have been nice though.

P:What else does the future hold?

A:Detective is the only thing I'm thinking of at the moment, but once that's under way and we get a healthy lead on it I'll tackle some other stuff including some of my own projects.

L & P Your work has been in front of the public for 5 years, and we think you've accomplished a tremendous amount in that time. We'd like to end by congratulating you on that, and thanking you very much for your time.

A Thank you

((For fairly obvious reasons, this is dedicated to Paul Neary and Robin Smith.))●

NOW OPEN TO THE PUBLIC! SATURDAYS ONLY 8:30-6:30

CHEAPEST IMPORTS EVER

75¢ COMICS @ 50p $1.50 COMICS @ £1.10

WIDE RANGE OF LOW-PRICED BACK ISSUES

SPECIAL OFFERS EVERY WEEK!

5% DISCOUNT ON ALL ADVANCE ORDERS!

WRITE OR PHONE FOR OUR MAIL ORDER CATALOGUE

021-236 2281 POSTCODE B3 1JY

JST LIKE A COMIC MART EVERY WEEK

16 FLEET ST. BIRMINGHAM 3.

Richard Starkings, c/o Marvel Comics Ltd

Ark 16 was another dead good read - both Ron Smith and John Wagner provided fascinating insights into the inner workings of DC Thomson and IPC. However, I was interested to read John Wagner's contention that "Marvel UK are a reprint company". Ask Barry Kitson if he thinks that Marvel UK are a reprint company. Ask Kev Hopgood if he thinks that Marvel UK are a reprint company. Ask Steve Alan, Johnny Aldrich, Jeff Anderson, Barry Appleby, Stephen Baskerville, Paul Bensburg, Robin Bouttell, John Burns Jnr, Mario Capaldi, Mike Collins, Jamie Delano, Mark Farmer, Simon Furman, John Gatehouse, Annie Halfacree, Gina Hart, John Higgins, James Hill, David Hine, David Lloyd, Ian Mannell, Grant Morrison, Tim Perkins, Stuart Place, Wilf Prigmore, John Ridgway, Ian Rimmer, Will Simpson and Robin Smith if they think that Marvel UK are a reprint company.

All of the above are freelance writers, artists, letterers and colourists who have been, and still are, working regularly for Marvel UK on approximately 100 pages of full colour originated material every month (plus 8 pages of black and white Doctor Who).

Furthermore, ask one of the two most prolific writers for IPC's boys' weeklies (who has been interested in working for Marvel UK for some time now) if he thinks Marvel UK are a reprint company.

And you can ask me too - and in every case you'll find the reply to be NO!

ALBERT THE MOUSE
GREETINGS FELLOW PANELOLOGISTS TODAY MY GUEST IS CAPTAIN BRITAIN! YOUR CAREERS BEEN VERY PATCHY HASN'T IT CAP?
YEAH.
I REREAD ALL OF YOUR ADVENTURES THE OTHER DAY AND FOUND THAT THE ONLY TIME THE BRIAN BRADDOCK SIDE OF YOUR LIFE WAS BEING TACKLED WAS WHEN ALAN DAVIS WAS DOING THE WRITING.
YEAH, WELL ALAN MOORE AVOIDED WRITING THE BRIAN BRADDOCK SIDE OF ME BECAUSE HE THOUGHT BRADDOCK WAS A BORING CHARACTER.
AND JAMIE DELANO WENT IN FOR JUST ACTION, WHICH IS FINE BUT A BIT ONE SIDED.
AND WE DON'T TALK ABOUT HOW CHRIS CLAREMONT SAW BRITAIN DO WE?
CRUMBLE!
BUT SERIOUSLY NOW, A MAIN FAULT WITH THE SERIES HAS BEEN A LACK OF DEPTH WHEN THE BRADDOCK CHARACTER AND EVEN THOUGH ALAN DAVIS TRIED HIS BEST TO ALTER THAT, HE WAS NEVER WRITING THE SERIES LONG ENOUGH TO MAKE ANYTHING HE DID COUNT.
WHICH BRINGS US TO THAT NICKNAME YOU GOT OVER BRADDOCK BEING SUCH A BORING CHARACTER.
NICKNAME? UH? WHAT???
YEAH, WHAT WAS THAT NAME AGAIN?
EH?_WELL_UM... YES...UM_ HUMPH!. UHH... A FLYING KEN BARLOW.
A BIT LOUDER PLEASE CAP.
A FLYING KEN BARLOW.
END.
HA!HA!HA!

Martin Crookall

Putting 3 of my articles into one issue does make writing a LoC on Ark 16 difficult for me (besides which, won't a surfeit of goodies create impossible expectations for Ark 17? It won't, huh? Sigh), since it cuts down on the number of things I can justifiably write about. Still, one will give it the old college try.

The interviews were interesting, not that I have any great concern for any of the 3 subjects. John Wagner's tales of working for DC Thomson were fun, as everyone's horror stories on that particular subject are, without fail. It makes me wonder whether Mrs Thatcher has any Scottish blood in her veins. Maybe she's one of the directors?

Frank Plowright makes a very good point about Eclipse comics, one I can't help echoing. I get into terrible arguments about whether Eclipse are going to be the coming wave, the great saviours of comics etc etc etc, when its obvious that most of their line is more bleedin' superheroes. I think it was Jan Strnad who coined the phrase "Willingness to pander" to describe the fortunes of the supposed-Independent companies, and to me Eclipse have the highest WTF factor going

(In case anyone needs a translation, MVP means the extent to which any given company is prepared to churn out virtual duplications of Marvel comics to get ahead.

Let's see: you put a long, long article on Camelot 3000 in and nowhere in it do the words - "this series was a travesty and pure crap" appear. You're doing this deliberately to provoke me aren't you?

Fascinating as the copious comparisons between Malory and Barr may be, detailed as the differences appear, self evident as the research is, one vital factor remains outstanding. The Arthur legends, the Grail myths, the Christian underpinnings are serious and vital matters, being practically the only English mythological cycle going. There is the matter of high adventure, noble purpose and serious beauty in there. There's even a damn good comics series to be created out of the prospect of Arthur's eventual return, but we haven't had one yet.

What we did have was banal super heroics superimposed on potentially moving legends. What we did have was even more evidence that there are precious few Americans with the grace and perception to know what to do with mythical material.

Accuse me of being a purist if you like. If being a purist means requiring more than the arbitrary labelling of repetitive 20th Century figures as Arthur, Guinevere and Lancelot then brother I'm sure I'm more than I want me to have you with a list of the catastrophic flaws in the material: our never-ending list of reincarnated the Grail as magic weapon not so far removed from, say, a Power Ring; as opposed to a religious item; all that pseudo-sexual stuff over Tristram; the failure to relate the series at all to the English background, need I go on?), nor even with the fact that it wasn't even a well-plotted comic series - Tristram again, with whom Barr got so besotted, he forgot half the story; or the fact that we're supposed to believe in Rebma and Co. as political leaders, or that in 1000 years time they still haven't discovered there's a tenth planet out there!

Really, Mike Barr should have stuck with Batman and the Outsiders, where he's capable of spinning enjoyable superhero stuff without any greater significance. Comparisons to character treatments between Malory and Camelot 3000 show only who's been reading his Malory, and lend a spurious credibility to one of the most badly plotted series of recent years.

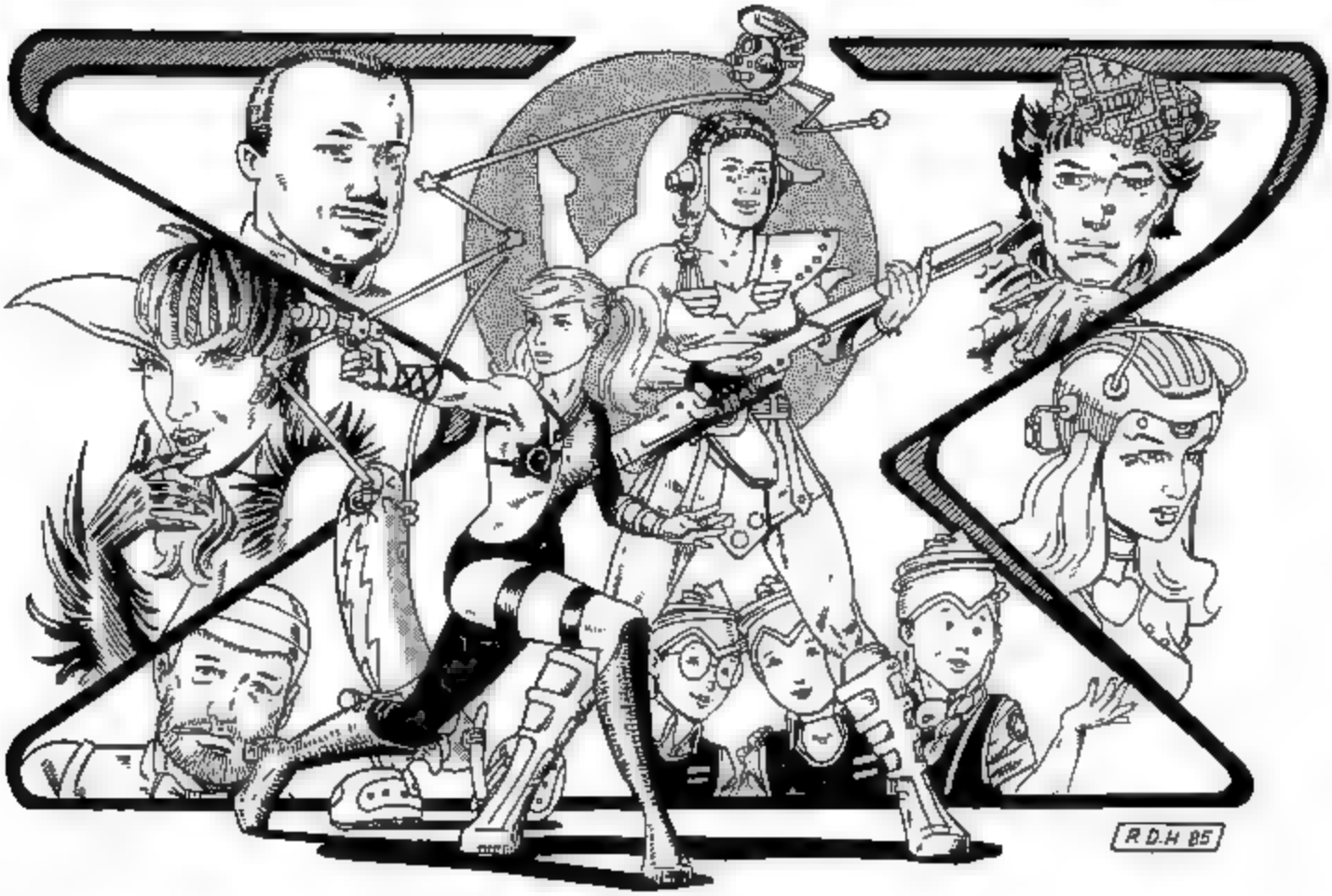
And incidently, though Brian Holland does up a storm, I begin to wonder if his style might not, ultimately, have been too clean and crisp for the source material. Great 20th Century perhaps, but Arthurian myth calls for a touch more mist and shadow - John Boorman's Excalibur is probably the best example of an apt visual approach.

Though Martin Drury does present his case well, I'm also wondering whether the sheer length of the article wasn't counter-productive. More than 4 sides, just to compare and contrast Malory and Barr seemed excessive and wearing.

Ah well, time enough to record that I favour the crisp white reverse of Arkus Sword and I'll be off.

Paul Harrison

Have you considered gestalt? (Changing the title to Crosstalk is weird) The Brain of Bunnage not only penned 3 articles but even took over half the letter column ((Martin will soon be putting together his own zine, so I suspect that sort of situation will not occur again - but do you really mind? I agree with the points he raised in the articles, so I shall mention them no further. There are few things more tedious than folks agreeing with each other. I agree, but the letter-hack that's a different matter. As Martin will know, his commentary on Bamboo Batman from Ark 3 and his philosophical observations on the nature of criticism and the appropriate responses thereto are serious incursions into MY territory! I'm the criminal advocate you see, while Martin is a mere conveyancer. I can't just stand by while he pushes his



false or simplistic assertions such as "a criminal is a criminal" and I claim my right to reply.

To start with, I fear I did not greatly appreciate the Ratman strip because the basic premise was utterly misleading. It seemed to me to be saying "This super-villain is evil - should he carry all our enmity himself or does the fault lie with society?" I didn't comment in any detail at the time because I assumed (apologies to Bamboo that he had intended no more than a superficial amusement and it just so happened that the theme was not to my taste. If however we are intended to take it as a work with deeper implications, here's my two-penn'orth

What is most misleading about Bamboo' strip is that we are presented with an evil man and offered two different viewpoints:1) he is immutably evil whether by reason of heredity, act of God or otherwise and ;2) he is evil due to social conditioning, childhood deprivation or similiar twist of fate. In 4-colour land, the evil costumed villain is a cliche of immense proportions, appearing as combatant in some 90% of stories. With few exceptions, such criminals are consummately self-assertively evil. Ratman went along with this stereotype. In real life however there are so few villains who consider themselves dedicated to wickedness that they could probably be counted on the knuckles of one finger. It is only the drastic over-simplification perpetuated by the comic book (and I suppose fantasy fiction in general) or possibly the tunnel-vision journalism of the popular press which reinforces the concept of the offender being different from the non-offender My assertion is that any difference is negligable. A "criminal" is generally just an ordinary chap who does something daft, often without any thought to the consequences, and repents at his leisure. Rest assured you need only get caught on a handful of occasions over a decade or so to end up on the end of a prison sentence. Without wishing to incriminate myself in ANY respect, it is tempting to view most convictions as a case of "...there but for the grace of God,.. " and, if you drive a motor vehicle, you stand a better than evens chance of at some stage joining the queue at your local Magistrates Court! Oh, I don't seek to pretend that all crimes are committed purely accidentally, but the number of offenders who actually think of themselves as criminal must be ridiculously small. (They don't don capes and tights either, but maybe that a just a question of style.) It is thus utterly misleading to start from the premise that the offender is wicked

To label the criminal a "psychopath" is unhelpful and simply serves to confuse. Most convicted criminals are as mentally sound as either you or I. In his discussion, Martin proceeds to offer two methods of dealing with the convicted offender - rehabilitation or retribution. This makes sense if the offender is viewed as conscientiously evil, but is too limiting in reality to form the basis of any rational decision If there is no unsound impulse in the offender requiring rehabilitation then that option becomes irrelevant Similiarly, no enlightened regime would seek retribution against someone whose transgression stems from an error of judgement or plain misfortune. Personally, I would like to see the entire argument shifted in favour of apology and reparation

Hmmm. Climbs off soapbox.

As far as the interviews were concerned, they maintained the high standard we expect from Ark. Glenn Fabry was permitted to ramble most entertainingly in the short time he was alloted

Ron Smith is about as near to mega-stardom as one can get without breaking out of the domestic UK scene. In the interview he seemed relaxed and affable and thoroughly disinterested in the American market. There was a fascinating contrast between Ron Smith a memories of DC Thomson (a good deal of affection and warmth) and John Wagner s vitrolic reminiscing Was the contrast carefully planned or did coincidence schedule both interviews into a single issue of Ark? Were Smith and Wagner working for DC Thomson around the same time or were they years apart? ((I must admit to being a bit devious with the interviews and trying to link them in some way - the contrast was planned. Also John

sees Dredd as the villain of the piece, while Ron sees him as the hero. Did anyone pick up on that? Ron was at DC Thomson from 1951 to 1970, while John was there around 1970 from what I can recollect.))

One last comment - at the risk of upsetting Martin Drury who obviously laboured long and hard on his Camelot 3000 article, the end result was awfully tedious. A little less of the staid references and a few more sparkling opinionated observations would have reduced the dusty text-book impression. Chris Willaims illustrations were good, though.

Fiona Jerome

I can see this letter turning into a straight conversation between Martin and myself, since he seems to have written most of the issue. So...fine Ellison article. With all respect I d say it was easy to sum up the man s most important aspects in the following line:"opinionated little shit-stirrer." You understand that this is more of a compliment than an insult. Enough cannot be made of the egotistical side to his nature. "The eclstic s eclectic" strikes me as a rather misleading title It rather suggests that Ellison is a difficult and acquired taste. While a number of readers may not take to Ellison's personality that pervades so much of his work, I've found few who find him hard to read There comes a point where you find out how manipulative of emotion he is (the slowest reader must click onto this after reading "All the Lies that are my life") and I think it's after that that you decide whether he's worth reading and believing, as opposed to simply reading.

You have to have a certain odd sense of humour to appreciate the Spectre. It s no good for writer or audience if no sense of enjoyment is engendered. I get the feeling Martin really doesn t like anything about the Spectre, which is okay, so long as he doesn't slip out downs like "So far the only riddle might be why everyone thinks the Spectre so marvellous a character when he clearly can't sell a story to save his...life" past me. Exactly the same thing can be said for each of the 7 Seconds, and we both know they re inspired creations, don t we, Martin?

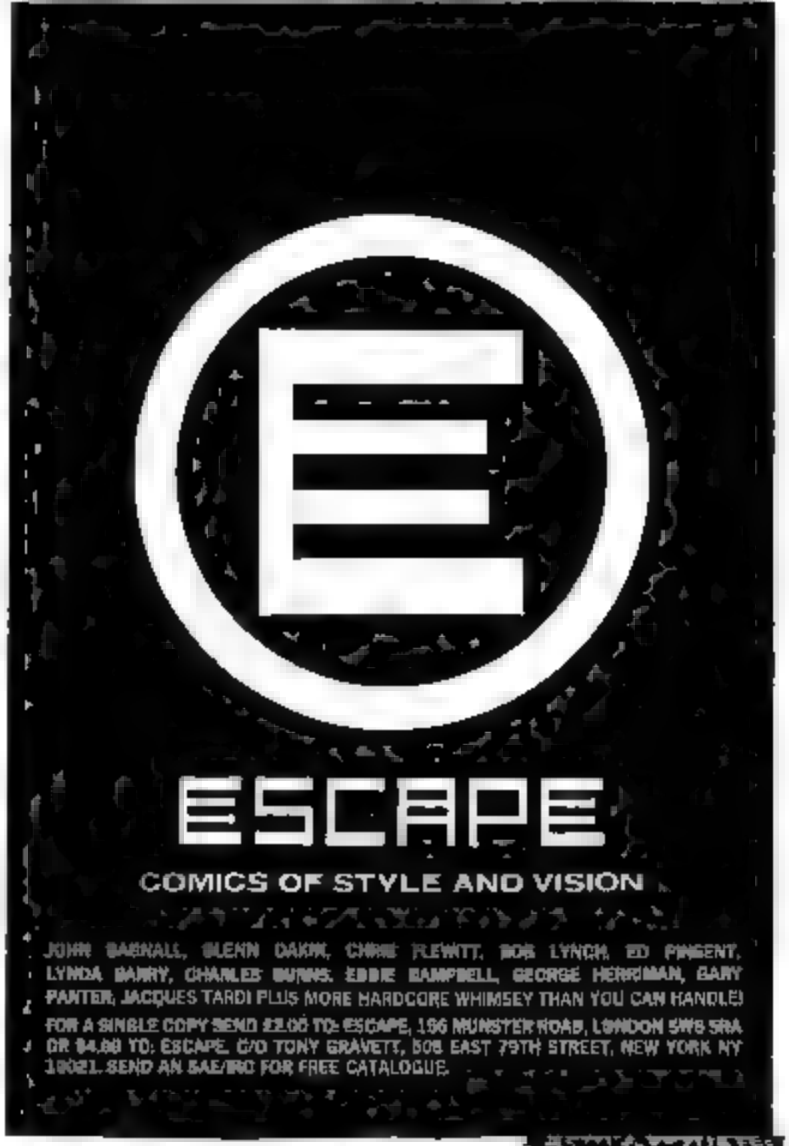
I really enjoyed the Thriller article. It came up with some new points, gave a good sense of the special excitement reading the series produced, and pointed out one or two plot contradictions I d failed to grasp. I often wish I'd never laid eyes on the last 4 issues, so I'd have a pure memory, so I could make up my own endings. Thriller 5 is one of my favourite comics. Of course, at the time I bought the whole set. Thriller really was a fairy-tale gone wrong. Thanks, Martin. Ah, a picky note - that peculiar style of Giffen's (not his Shuster copy Superman style, but the one used for Ambush Bug etc) is swiped from the European duo Munes & Sampayo (but we don t know which one is the artist) He swipes actual panels, & the overall look. ((I think that the subject of plagiarism should be looked at more closely. When does an artist or writer cross the line between homage and plagiarism? An interesting subject I think.))

Miller can so draw a good human face. His faces are at least as useful to him as his bodies. They don t look much like faces, but I find they express things perfectly adequately. Compare the range of expressions Miller manages to draw with the pitiful number Perez can come up with. I felt the control on movement, and then the sudden releases, worked very well.

I really enjoyed Ronin both as a read, and as item for study. I spend too much time analysing things I don't care for at university to do the same for comics in my own time. I cannot remember writing an article on anything I really didn't enjoy. I like to think that I only write on what's worth investigating. No, no, Ronin really got me glowin.

Stan Lee certainly hasn t contributed to the medium on the same level as Eisner. His early work was great, but not the greatest. He contributed formats, but I don't think his approaches, which have shaped whole generations of comic writers, have added quality to the medium.

And that ends this issues lettercol. Please send all your letters to Cutting Comments, Paul Duncan


ESCAPE
COMICS OF STYLE AND VISION
JOHN BAGNALL, GLENN DAKIN, CHRIS FLEWITT, BOB LYNCH, ED PINGENT, LYNDA BARRY, CHARLES BURNS, EDDIE CAMPBELL, GEORGE HERRIMAN, GARY PANTER, JACQUES TARDI PLUS MORE HARDCORE WHIMSEY THAN YOU CAN HANDLE!
FOR A SINGLE COPY SEND £2.00 TO: ESCAPE, 156 MUNSTER ROAD, LONDON SW6 5RA OR $4.00 TO: ESCAPE, C/O TONY GRAVETT, 508 EAST 79TH STREET, NEW YORK NY 10021. SEND AN SAE/IRC FOR FREE CATALOGUE.

NASTY CHICKS BIG NIGHT OUT
THAT'S THE SEVENTH SHANDY YOU'VE HAD SO FAR CHUCK, I DON'T THINK YOU SHOULD HAVE ANY MORE!
AW COME ON DEPHNE, ANOTHER 1 & ONE ...!
I WANNA CHUCK REMEMBER THAT LAST TIME YOU GOT LEGLESS? / DID YOU LOSE OUT OF YOUR MIND ON HALF A PACKET OF LIME CRISPS?
HEY DON'T WE CHAT UP A COUPLE OF GIRLS?
MMM, THERE'S A GOOD IDEA!
SO...
ARE YOU GOING TO BUY ME A DRINK LARRY?
CAN'T YOU BUY YOUR OWN?
SHE'S ALL PART OF THE GAME?
SHE'S ME MONEY ON DRINKS FOR STRANGE WOMEN IS ALL PART OF THE GAME? THAT'S YOUR RISK OF FUN!
SHE'S IT! VALENTINA CHUCK THE GUYS BUY THE GIRLS DRINKS, THAT'S HOW IT'S ALWAYS DONE!
BUT I BELIEVE IN EQUALITY THESE DAYS
WELL YES, THEY ARE, WHEN THE CIRCUMSTANCES SUIT THEM
AND WHEN IT COMES TO FREE DRINKS
THE CIRCUMSTANCES DON'T SUIT THEM
DO YOU BELIEVE IN EQUALITY?
I ONLY ASKED FOR A DRINK! NOT A HOLIDAY IN SO-HOSS!
I TOLD YOU YOU SHOULD HAVE BOUGHT HER A DRINK!
EQUALITY? HOPEFUL? IT'S A JOKE? I MEAN, WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU SAW OUR TROOPS BEING PICKED UP BY A SHE-WOMAN?
OR WOMEN IN THE FRONT LINES, DURING A WAR?
AND HOW MANY WOMEN EVER INVENTED ANYTHING?
I TELL YOU THEY'RE ONLY FIT FOR MAKING BABIES AND COOKING!
I HEARD THAT YOU MADE CHAUVINISTIC BASTARD?
WHAT? HEY CHUCK, C'MON LOOK OVER THERE NOW THERE'S A GORGEOUS GIRL IF I EVER SAW ONE
WOW!
HELLO, MY NAME'S HAIRY CHUCK PANTHER BUT YOU CAN CALL ME HAIRY
HE'S HE! HE'S HE! HE'S CUTE.
HE'S SO LOVELY.
TEE HE GIGGLE. ARE YOU GOING TO BUY ME A DRINK?
SWAK!
?!
END.

Stephen Bissette

Swamp Thing has been instrumental in making horror a popular subject again in comics. Steve Bissette and oft-times collaborator John Totleben have sprung to prominence due to the success of Swamp Thing, written by Alan Moore. However, Steve has been around for a few years, contributing to many comics and magazines like Sgt Rock, Heavy Metal, Epic, Bizarre Adventures and House of Mystery. His manic pencilling and layouts add tension to the stories he tells, taking them nearer to the edge. He is now in the forefront of a horror revival, and loving every gut-wrenching minute of it

This interview took place the morning after the UKCAC at Steve's hotel, which accounts for Alan Moore's presence in the middle. My thanks to Steve for the cover, the stacks of copies, and his kind co-operation,

BEST, Paul

Steve:The first thing I did was an Underground called Abyss, which had a limited press run of 200 copies. That was really the first comic work that I did. Before that I'd just done sketches Steve Perry (of Timespirits) wrote a 35-page story which, for us, was long, while we were both at Johnson State College in Johnson, Vermont Jack Venooker also worked on Abyss, and he later published another Underground I was in called The Journal of Popular Culture.

Paul What was your opinion of your art? Did it look like anything you do today?

S:No, not at all. I was drawing with Pilote fine-point markers on typing paper, which was pretty crude. It was mostly enthusiasm

P:It was with Abyss that you got into Joe Kubert's School.

S:Yes, that was my portfolio piece. That's what convinced Joe that I was serious about what I was doing regardless of how unpolished the work may have been

While I was at Joe's school, Rick Veitch was sending a story to Clifford Neal of Dr. Wirtham's Comics and Stories as I pitched in a class assignment I'd done for Dick Giordano, Grave Concern. It was my reaction to Dino de Laurentiis' King Kong, where Dino de Guerratino is watching his latest epic Queen Kong. It freezes in the projector and the frame burns. He goes up to see what a happened and the 3 original creators of King Kong have risen from the grave and are waiting for him up there. I did 3 other stories for Dr. Wirtham's with Rick Veitch and we also did a cover. That was rather grotesque with a fellow drawing a character called the Hooded Lady, using his face as the material, saying,"Wertham was right." Which in a way he was. We also did Cell Food (reprinted in Bedlam) which was one of the most polished things Rick and I did together. That was actually the finished version of a story I wrote back in High School, and I'd always liked the basic idea.

I also hooked up with Larry Shell when I was at the school. Larry did me a big favour by connecting me with Heavy Metal which led immediately to work for me. For Larry I did things for 50's Funnies, Alien Encounters, and for 60's Funnies, which never came out. I did a full-colour back cover, The History of Acid, but I don't know when that'll be used. That was pretty much the extent of my Underground work.

The U/g was important to me because the work in the late 60's/early 70's had gotten me into wanting to draw comics again. Prior to that I hadn't really looked at a comic from the age of 11

P:What do you remember most about the Joe Kubert School?

S:The intensity of the experience. I was in the first class and the course lasted 2 years. I was rooming with guys who were going to the school. You're in the school from say, 8 in the morning, to sometimes 3 the following morning. You're living, eating, breathing and shitting comics. That's all you're doing the whole time.

The classes were pretty unfocussed at the time. They were still figuring out what they were doing and how to put it together. I thrived in that environment. Some of my classmates didn't like it. They were pissed-off by the final result. They were looking for a structured, academic approach to the whole thing All the teachers were working professionals and only 3 of them knew how to teach in terms of structuring lessons so that they built up on one another. Dick Giordano was one, and Nic Estrada the other. That was very valuable, but even more valuable were the hours spent after class with Lee Elias, dubbed The Midnight Philosopher because he'd be up until 2 or 3 talking to us. A lot came out of that. And Joe, for the first year, had his studio in the school and we were pretty much free to sit in if he was working, up to 4 in the morning Being able to talk to Joe, having this one on one relationship, and watching him work with pens behind the ears, in his mouth, with everything flowing, was inspiring stuff. Prior to this I had been living in Vermont, and I'd be pumping gas now if I hadn't gone to the school. It compressed 10 years of going through the ropes myself and learning from my mistakes into 2 years. Before the second year was up I'd already gone to the offices of various publishers with my portfolio. I had work at Heavy Metal before I graduated. In fact the first thing I did in Heavy Metal, Curious Thing, I combined as an assignment for Irwin Hasen. We weren't supposed to do that, but we got away with it a little more often than we probably should have. Before the 2 years were up a number of us had hands-on experience of working in comics

P You also did Sgt. Rock, Unexpected, House of Mystery, and Sojourn around this time

S:Yes. It was very flattering that Joe came to me out of everyone else in the school and asked,'Do you want to do a poster in Sojourn?' That was great. I can't say, but I think what hit Joe about me was that my work was really crude when I came in - I had never worked with a real pen or brush - and when Joe got me to pick up a brush, in his words I 'took to it like a duck to water.' It was really the perfect instrument for what I wanted to do The work we did for Sgt. Rock was directly through the school. You weren't paid much for writing or drawing, but the experience of working from one of Robert Kanigher's scripts, and learning what did and didn't print, was all part of the school. The work for Scholastic, a number of humorous horror comics, came directly out of the school. In the second year Joe gave me the job of doing a 3-page story for Weird Worlds I did 3 of them directly through Joe, where he'd give me the script, and approve every step of the job After I left the school he very graciously gave me the account, which was wonderful - it kept me eating for 5 years.

P:You collaborated with Rick Veitch on the film adaptation of 1941, packaged by Heavy Metal, and on Monkey See, which appeared in Epic 1.

S:We did Monkey See first actually. We sold it to Rick Marschall, when he was at Marvel, who was the one who sort of created Epic by pushing it through upstairs and getting it together. He was booted out before it was done but ours was one of the stories that had already been paid for, so Archie Goodwin used it. That was done first and that was really our test run

P:On your own your art is frenetic and mad, but when working with Rick Veitch he seems to tone that down

S That was part of the strength of our collaboration. Rick is in some ways more restrained, but we still go for that fine edge where you're stepping over to madness. I like Rick's work to this day. Some consider his art on The One to be crude, but I consider it to be raw. Rick doesn't have the inkline that I have, which is also present in my pencils when John inks me. What came out of this period included

Left:Steve's pencils for a Swamp Thing pin-up.

HERE BE THE FACTS IN THE CASE OF S.R. Bissette.
I WAS BORN WITH AN UNUSUAL LUMP ON MY HEAD, WHICH DISAPPEARED AS I GREW OLDER.
A PRONOUNCED FASCINATION WITH THE ABNORMAL WAS OBVIOUS AT AN EARLY AGE.
FASCINATION TURNED TO OBSESSION...
DESPITE THE NUMEROUS DIVERSIONS THAT LIFE OFFERS.
No FAIR PEEKIN!
AAHHEEEGH
AMEN!!
OF COURSE NOW THAT I'VE BEEN THRU "CARTOONIST'S MONASTARY AND PREPARE TO ENTER THE PROFESSION...
I CAN EASILY CONTROL SUCH CHILDISH OBSESSIONS!
SKORT SKWIRM
MUNCH CRUNCH GULPKT
KLUNCH CHEWKT

John Totleben (left) and Steve Bissette at UKCAC '85.

Monkey See, Cell Food, 1941 and others. We would pass pages back and forth and what came out was a synthesis of both of us. I wasn't just pencilling, and Rick wasn't just inking. When one of us had nothing more to give to the page we just passed it on. I think the style that came out was unique.

1941 was my ticket out of New Jersey (where I was living with Rick, Tom Yeates and John Totleben) back to Vermont, but we were left out on a limb while doing it. We had to steal a shooting script to work from. We had to, through office espionage, steal photos to work from. So we were pretty well cut out of the creative process of 1941, and that's where the bizarre look comes from. We bought an entire year and a half of Life magazine, from January '41 to May '42, and created all these mad collage characters. We didn't want to bring in stuff that didn't belong to the period. Also a lot of the craziness came out of doing 64 full-colour pages in 60 days. There were a lot of problems. Allan Asherman was supposed to have written a script. Indeed he wrote half of what you see in the book now, but the latter half was withheld from us by the editor, Julie Simmons, for whatever reason, until it was too late. So Rick had to write the last half of the book as he was lettering it from the shooting script. It's a good thing we'd stolen the shooting script. We were up until 3 or 4 in the morning, at eachother's throats, by the end of the job. I look at the book now and I see a slap-dash thing to it which was in keeping to the spirit we were trying to get. The most gratifying thing to me was seeing a 11 year old at the mall where we lived, pick it up and laugh as he was going through it. That was the audience reaction I enjoyed the most I guess.

P You later did Kults on your own for Epic.

S That was about the madness I saw in the cult movie audiences. To me it's a terribly dated story now, but at the time it was a synthesis of all the things I'd seen. I <u>love</u> film, and the weirder and darker and more far out the film, the more I tend to like it. I'm not just talking in terms of violence, but a really bizarre film.

When I was at the Kubert school we'd go into New York once or twice a week. I'll never forget seeing the First Rocky Horror Picture Show crowd. Glimsing the First Eraserhead poster I saw, there was an electricity in the air about anything that was that unusual and was generating that much publicity. In Kults I set up the logical extreme of what I saw in the Rocky Horror audience. They weren't there to see the movie, but to see themselves, and to perform with the film.

Shortly after Kults I started doing work for Marvel Preview. I did a story called

Into the Shop, written by Ron Goulart. Then Lynn Graeme took over as editor and I did a fill-in that Roger Stern had written, The Fantasy Gambit Lynn and I then planned to do a thing called Kestrel Falconer, but she never got around to writing it, and she was fired before it got started Then Denny O'Neil took over and Steve Perry and I did A Frog Is a Frog for him. That's one of my favourites, and one I'm still proud of. Denny was so pleased with it that he asked us to do Dracula for a horror issue they did to retain copyright on their horror characters. My wife & I had to move twice during the 3-month period I had to do the job I'm slow anyway, but with this so I called John Totleben to see if he could give me a hand for a week. In that week we got about a third of the story done, passing pages back and forth. Despite the pressure and all that we had a good time doing it, and so thought that perhaps we should look into doing something together.

A good deal of time passed between us putting together Swamp Thing and that experience. During that time I was doing a 3 issue science comic for Marvel. The intention was to package 3 32-page comics then to put it all into a textbook with a teacher's guide that would go to the schools. It's a great idea. The first issue covered the basics of science, atoms, and the history of the planet. The second one had the theories of evolution etc The problem was that a con-man had put together the package. He promised a great deal more than he could deliver and, in fact, he promised connections with scientists that didn't exist. I had completed the first issue, and this con-man was supposed to write it, but he couldn t write so Jim Shooter ended up having to write it. I did this for a full 3 years, which is an absurdly long time for the amount of pages. Basically the reason I gave up was that all the research was dumped into my lap. This guy couldn't do his work and Jim was too busy to do anything but write the dialogue from the layouts and plot outlines that I put together. I had my own massive library of dinosaur and prehistoric life, 3 of Darwin s books - not easy going - and 3 of Stephen J. Gould s books, which were collections of essays. It was up to me to digest all this as quickly as I could, which took me about 2 months, and then synthesize it all down to a 32 page comic which covers the whole thing Marvel had connections with Stephen J. Gould, who was going to approve it. He approved the first issue except the 4 pages dealing with early men. But I couldn t speak to Gould to find out how he wanted it, his books didn t tell me what he thought, and if you read any 2 books on early man you're going to get 2 completely different

Above: An illo of the animated film Wizards.

versions with thousands of years difference. That's when I finally threw in the towel. Marvel did too, and they asked that I just send everything back. I was paid well for my work and I went away with no ill feelings towards Marvel

So when the opportunity to do Swamp Thing arose I took it I had laid out issue 8 for Tom Yeates - for you hardcores out there if you turn the splashpage upsidedown under the dinosaur's tail is "SRB layouts" which was the only way Tom could get me credited. John Totleben had been working on Swamp Thing for much longer, pencilling with Tom on and off since issue 2. The only issues John did where you can really see his stuff peeking through was issue 11, which he got co-artist credit for. Tom felt, in a way, that we should have been doing the book all along He did some great stuff on the book - it led to a breakthrough in his art on Timespirits - but he doesn't enjoy horror stories. I love them, and so does John. Tom had decided to finish on the book, and he got us 3 or 4 months beforehand and told us to put some samples together which he d bring up to Len Wein, the editor

Meanwhile, Tim Truman called us in to do some art for TSR, the Dungeons & Dragons people. For a mad 2 weeks at a Holiday Inn in New Jersey, just outside Dover where the Hubert school was, we designed D & D toys. There was Mick Veitch, Tim of course, Tom Mandrake, Ron Randall, John and I. John and I took on the bulk of the monsters because that's where our interest lies. During those 2 weeks we put together our Swamp Thing samples. I pencilled up a 3 page senseless narrative sequence, and John inked 2 of the pages to show how we'd work together. We saved one pencilled page to show them what the pencils looked like. John had a much better feel for the character at that point. It was his touch which transformed it from this ugly man-

BAM
EEEEEYAAAAAAAAAA!
A FEW SECONDS LATER THE SWAMP ABBEY BELIEVES THE CHILDREN OF HIS HAS CREATED
HEY LOUIE— DON'T GET CARRIED AWAY!
HA HA! I GOTTA HAND IT TO YOU, LOUIE.
WHY'D YOU HAVE TO BRAY UP THAT GUY? I'LL WERE JUST SUPPOSED TO SCARE THEM AWAY!
HA HA HA! IMAGINE THEM BELIEVING THAT OLD GHOST STORY!
DON'T WORRY— THIS OLD COSTUME DID THE TRICK NOW WE'LL HAVE NO TROUBLE BURYING UP ALL THIS LAND— AND HEH HEH— THE OIL THAT'S UNDERNEATH IT!

like thing I had drawn, into what was definitely Swamp Thing, with the mood and everything. Len Wein responded to that and really liked what we had done. He asked if we could do it monthly. We lied a bit and said,"Oh yes, we can" and got the job. Also, Len knew we were familiar with the book and working from Marty Pasko's scripts. We were a little hesitant about working from Marty's scripts for a long time, so we decided between ourselves to do it for a year.

F:So you were pleased when Alan Moore came along.

S:Overjoyed. Marty was having a terrible time. He was living on the West Coast working more and more for television, being paid hundreds and thousands per script. The comic book money is spit next to that. We were behind before we started. We were accepted for the book in December and nothing arrived on issue 16 until the second week in January, and it was supposed to be at the printers the next week. It was insane. They skipped a month between 17 and 18, and 18 was mostly reprint, to let us get back on course. My wife, Nancy, had a baby at that time, which of course cut into my working day. Marty fell further and further behind so that by 19 I ended up co-plotting the thing by default. I would be phoning Marty 5 times a week trying to squeeze 3 pages of plot out of him, and he would dialogue it afterwards. That went on for so long they almost cancelled the book. Thank God they didn't because Alan Moore was brought in for the next issue. While I was still struggling with 19 Len had already contacted Alan to do 20. John was juggling both books at the same time, 20 having been pencilled by Dan Day in a remarkably short time

We were overjoyed that Alan was writing Swamp Thing being familiar with his Warrior stuff - Marvelman and V for Vendetta

In fact John was saying the other night that he remembers a phone conversation we had where we weren't happy with what Marty was doing on the book. He was a good writer but he didn t have a feel for horror We even said it'd be great if someone like Alan took over the book. As soon as we heard he was doing it we started to exchange massive 15 20 page letters full of things that interested us,like drawings of how we wanted monsters to look. The first thing we wanted which Alan synthesized into that first issue, number 21 - The Anatomy Lesson - though it wasn't our input that caused it, was to go further with the idea that he was a plant He s moss and vines. He s full of bugs. He stinks. Len said no, he had to look like Berni Wrightson did it, smooth skin and a few roots, and he didn't want us to go all the way There was a drawing that John did, that looks tame now but at the time looked radical, with Swamp Thing as a living, man-shaped bog. We sent that to Alan with one of our first packages and what he did was to structure that story in such a way that Len had to accept the precedent of Swamp Thing growing a new body. That was all we needed to go ape shit and do what we wanted to do on the strip

The book had survived for years, even under Marty, with the man-trapped-in-the-monster-s-body theme. You can t build a character on that. It was a pitiful thing. It had worked for Len and Bernie for 10 issues and it had been very poetic, but it had gone nowhere since then. What Alan did, which was above and beyond anything John and I had imagined, was to set up that origin where he simply wasn't a man. He's a plant. All that was left of the man was a vestige of this dead man's consciousness. This was wonderful. It was what the character needed. It suddenly pushed him onto a plateau, a whole different tangent he hadn't been on before

F I noticed from the issues that Alfredo Alcala inked that you seemed to pencil a bit like Berni Wrightson ((Alan Moore sits down to have a cup of tea. After the greetings subsided...))

S It was a bit different then that. The issues Alfredo did were a bit tame compared to what John and I are doing I can see that the zombie issue Alfredo inked looks staid and straightforward but had he been inking the pencils of the Demon story it would have been a lot different These pencils were as mad as John inked them. Also I altered how I usually pencilled for Alfredo. I did very tight straightforward pencils and there wasn't much leeway to play with as there is with John because we have our own chemistry, but I didn't know what the hell Alfredo was going to do. I'll do these mad

movements and John has the line work where you still have that movement, but Alfredo has this little stroke that freezes. You don't get the movement. It looks like a stack of needles frozen in the air. In fact, Alfredo was John's choice for a replacement.

P: You plan your replacements and fill-in issues don't you?

S: Yes. The first fill in issue was Shawn McManus' The Burial. At that point Karen Berger had become the editor, and she's very much on the ball. I m slow and Len s slow and that doesn't make for good scheduling. It takes me 5 weeks to pencil the book an it became apparent that every 3 months we're 3 weeks behind. So starting with The Burial Karen would arrange with Alan which issue would need to be a fill-in, which would enable Alan to gear the story to someone other that John and I. We also have a say in who the artists should be. Shawn was Karen's choice - we hadn t seen any of Shawn's art prior to that - and he was a good choice. I still think Shawn did a better job on Pog than John and I would have because he brought a charm to those little animal characters that we couldn t.

Alan: I knew that was for Shawn so I wrote it bearing Shawn's strengths in mind.

S: From that time on any time a fill in was necessary we pretty much tried to plan it. The only one that caught us off-guard was when issue 33 was supposed to be Rites of Spring but that issue took me more than 6 weeks to do. Karen saw the quality of the work we were doing and gave us more time, but that left issue 33 with blank pages. It was my suggestion that they reprint the story they've never reprinted - the very first Swamp Thing.

A: Karen phoned me up and said, "We're doomed" or words to that effect. She was sobbing on the other end of the phone asking which one they should reprint, and then deciding on the very first one.

S: Which I was really pushing for.

A: But that left her with another 12 pages to fill, and the old House of Mystery story only had tenuous connections with Swamp Thing anyway. I was asking Karen that if she had an artist to do the 12 pages really fast when did she need the script for? She said by the end of the week. This was Monday.

P: And to America.

A: So I thought that if I wrote it tomorrow and got it in the post Wednesday morning it should be there by Friday morning if I sent it special delivery. I just wrote the 12 pages in a day, and I didn t have any idea what I was going to write. I was really pleased in the end. It was one of those where you land on your feet, y'know what I mean?

S: Ron Randall was our choice. He'd been in John's class at the Kubert school. Ron

Gook! Listen!
Wha-?
Everything's shaking--!
Earthquake!!
Run for your lives!!
The earthquake is a real monster!
Well--like tried to warn them the swamp was alive...
By morning, the swamp sleeps peacefully again...
The murky waters shimmer with life...
The still air carries its song...
Grubb Oil
The moral of our story is that even an oil company can be on shaky ground sometimes. Of course, there was only one reason why Grubb Oil didn't get the swamp--it got them first!
End

Opposite: "Return of the Swamp Beast" from Weird Worlds 3.
Above: "Bogged Down" from Weird Worlds 7.

added so many things - the nightmare painting and the great little touch at the end with the crumpled ball of paper being Swamp Thing's face. We also filled it out with 3 pages of pin-ups, which we had wanted to do for a long time.

A: It came over as a substantial issue. No-one complained about it.

S: In fact it set up what we wanted to do in American Gothic.

P: Which was the elemental side of it. ((At this point Alan leaves.))

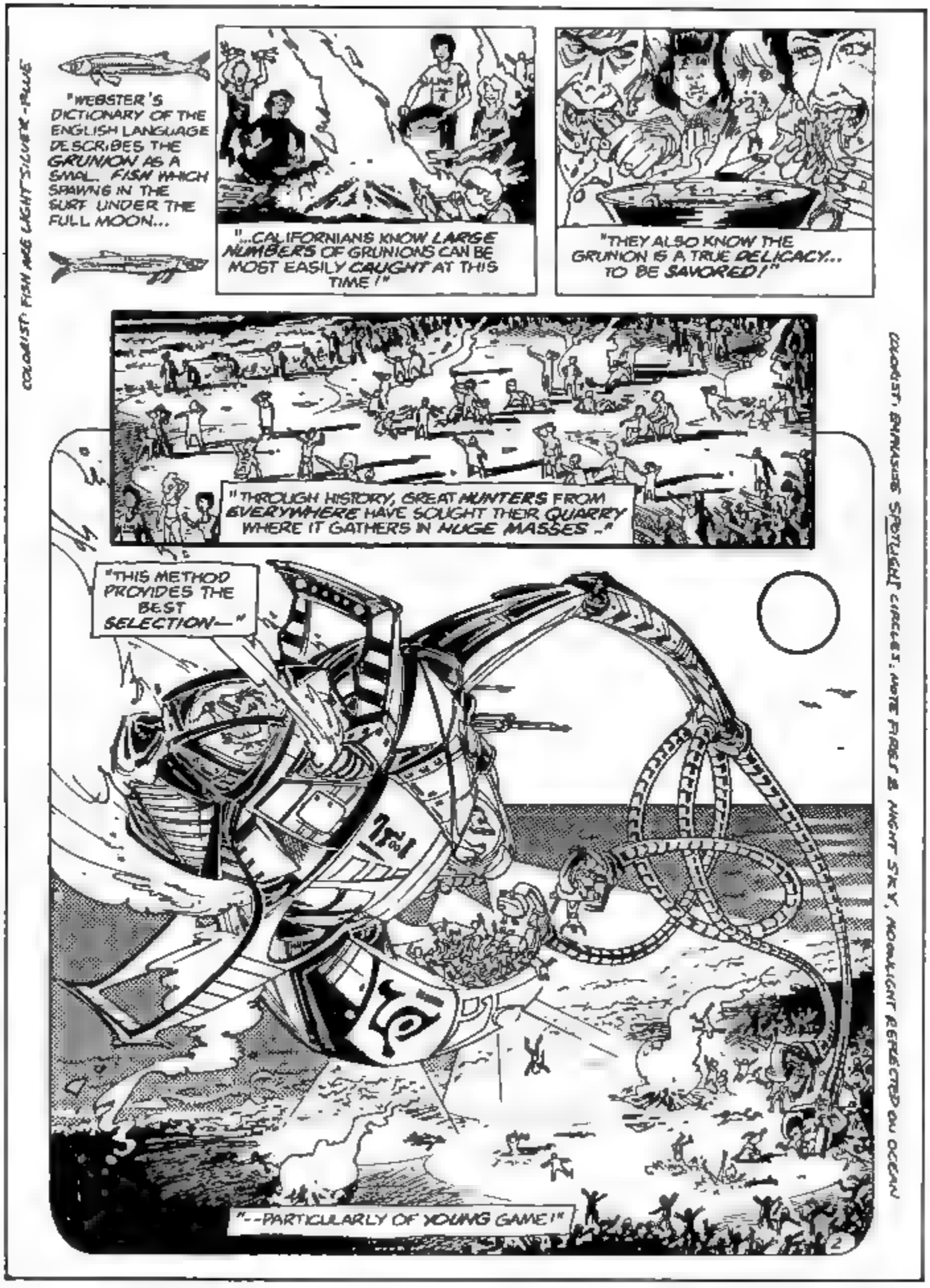
S: So that was the most slap-dash we did in terms of fill-ins. Sometimes we screw ourselves though. The Winchester House episode (Swamp Thing 45) is one we both passed on because the architecture is very time consuming and I go batty if I'm using a ruler for too long. Then it turns out to be one of the best horror stories that Alan has written. So we sort of cut our own throats on that one. We got the script and we both went, "Shit. Shit! Oh, fuck." but there was nothing we could do at that point.

P: You've used a lot of different techniques in Swamp Thing, but Rites of Spring stands out as a combination of them all. You used photos. You used colour overlays. You used...

S: Anything we could fin.

P: You could use that issue as a portfolio.

S: If it hadn't been stolen from the DC offices. We tried to use everything, but not as gimmicks. The idea was to try to bring the reader as close as possible to a hallucinogenic trip, and to create as an impressionistic a portrait as we could of the consummation of love. We consciously wanted to convey something that hadn't been done in comics before - real love. Alan and I exchanged letters saying love comics are shit and have nothing to do with the emotion of love but are concerned with the contrivance and soap opera. We really wanted to express that


COLORIST: FISH ARE LIGHT SILVERY-BLUE
"WEBSTER'S DICTIONARY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE DESCRIBES THE GRUNION AS A SMALL FISH WHICH SPAWNS IN THE SURF UNDER THE FULL MOON...
"...CALIFORNIANS KNOW LARGE NUMBERS OF GRUNIONS CAN BE MOST EASILY CAUGHT AT THIS TIME!"
"THEY ALSO KNOW THE GRUNION IS A TRUE DELICACY... TO BE SAVORED!"
"THROUGH HISTORY, GREAT HUNTERS FROM EVERYWHERE HAVE SOUGHT THEIR QUARRY WHERE IT GATHERS IN HUGE MASSES..."
"THIS METHOD PROVIDES THE BEST SELECTION—"
"--PARTICULARLY OF YOUNG GAME!"
COLORIST: SPOTLIGHT CIRCLES: WHITE FIRES & NIGHT SKY, MOONLIGHT REFLECTED ON OCEAN

Above: A page from "Small Fry" which appeared in House of Mystery 199. Plot, pencils and inks by Steve, script by Bill Kelley.

WITHOUT, IT IS UNBAINLY AND FORMLESS, MOVED ONLY BY THE INSISTANT LULLABY OF THE SEA.
WITHIN, IT IS THE FREE-FORM LOVER OF UNKNOWABLE DEPTHS, THE SIREN OF ETERNAL EXPLORERS, THE EYE THAT SEES FOREVER.
I ANSWER IT'S CALL AND CARESS ITS DREAMSHIFT HEART.
WITH THE TOUCH OF FLESH UPON FLESH, IT SHUDDERS AND OPENS THE FINE WEBBING OF ITS SECRET SELF TO ME.
THE INNER EYE OPENS FROM THE SLEEP OF WAKING.

Following 2 pages:In 1982 John Totleben wrote and pencilled an introduction to Hukaface. These are the 3rd and 4th pages. The 4th page is inked by Steve Bissette

Left: A page from "Lo!" which was reprinted in Bedlam.

Right: Rocky Horror Picture Show

---

primal beauty, and that primal lunacy that is love. From the time we began discussing it I decided we were going off the deep end with this one. What gelled it for me was turning the book on its side If the ads hadn t been there it would have been perfect, but I m happy that people still come up to me today and say,"I turned the book and I didn't even know I had done it " That was the trick, to lay it out so that by the time they realised what they'd done they were already halfway through the sequence.

P It had been done before by Alex Toth, Dave Sim, and John Byrne.

S:But they did it from page one. The whole book was set up that way. For Swamp Thing there was no way of putting a chemical in the paper so the reader was tripping by the time he'd reached that sequence I wanted to distort how you look at a comic book which would bring you closer to perception changes that hallucigenics will cause The easiest way to do that was to simply turn the book. John and I also had a different proportion on the comic page that we hadn't had before.

P:Which gave you a larger canvas to work on.

S:Exactly. We had more vertical height than we do on any other page, which meant we had a lot of design problems we hadn't had before, but it made it a lot of fun. Like, near the end we had the two faces in the vegetable/flesh union, which is pure Greg Irons. His Underground book, Light, had a great deal of these flesh fusions happening.

P Rites of Spring also had a painted cover.

S Yes. We'd been trying to push one through for a long time. When The Comics Journal put together their interview issue they asked for a cover and we took the opportunity to do a painting so good that DC would say,"Why don t you do a couple of those for us?" And it worked exactly the way we wanted it to

P American Gothic seems to be a journey through the social ills of America: the community of Vampires; the repression of women; racism; serial killers; guns. Isn't American Gothic relevant to the 80s like Green Lantern/ Green Arrow was relevant to the 60s?

S:The strength of horror fiction, and I think of

GOOD LORD!!
UHH WE HAVE A SHORT HAFT
PROPERTY U.S. G
DANGER RADIOACTIVE
WHAT'S HE DOING TO ALL THESE PEOPLE!
I BETTER LEAVE HIM OUTSIDE... CAUSE IF I'M NOT MISTAKEN...
THIS IS AN ABANDONED ATOMIC WASTE WAREHOUSE.
COME.. UHH
ACTIVE WASTE
UHH... STUFF KICKS, GOOD!
BETTER THAN ... STERNO
HE...
...HE'S DRINKING THAT STUFF!
GOOD GOD...NO WONDER HE'S GOT A BURN-HOLE FOR A BRAIN!
THIS GUY WAS PROBABLY JUST AN OLD STERNO BUM — BUT NOW..!?
.. AND THESE PEOPLE... MORE DEAD THAN ALIVE!
NOW YOU... DRINK!
OH GREAT .. NOW HE WANTS ME TO BE HIS DRINKING BUDDY!

NO THANKS... PAL! I'VE GOT ENOUGH SHIT IN MY SYSTEM!
FWAK!
EEK!
YOU... HFFF... NOT MY... BUDDY!
WHOOOFF
UHH!
GRAK
...STRONGER THAN I... THOUGHT...
POUK
TOOK
DAMN.. I CAN'T... EVEN SHAKE HIM!
FINALLY...
SPLAK!

© 1983 D C Comics All rights reserved Used with permission.

sciance fiction, is that through metaphor you can bear the truths more vividly than you can if you are depicting the real situation. Now Denny O Neil and Neal Adams' GL/GA was Relevant It was in the forefront. It was set in the real world in terms of dealing with the blacks etc. I m glad that the message in American Gothic has come through but the strength of the story as a horror story comes first. The zombie story is about racism but it's never as overtly stated as GL/GA was, or even, more to the point, Nukeface (Swamp Thing 35/36) which was definitely our view on the toxic waste dumping thing, but it was never put in the form of anti-nuclear retsoric. The clippings were all pro-nuclear. They were all real. It got very scary that I could buy a daily paper and pick out 5 to 8 scary articles every day. I had been aware of what was going on but not the scope of it. It was a depressing two issues to work on because these things were so easy to find

P It reminded me a lot of Atomic Cafe.

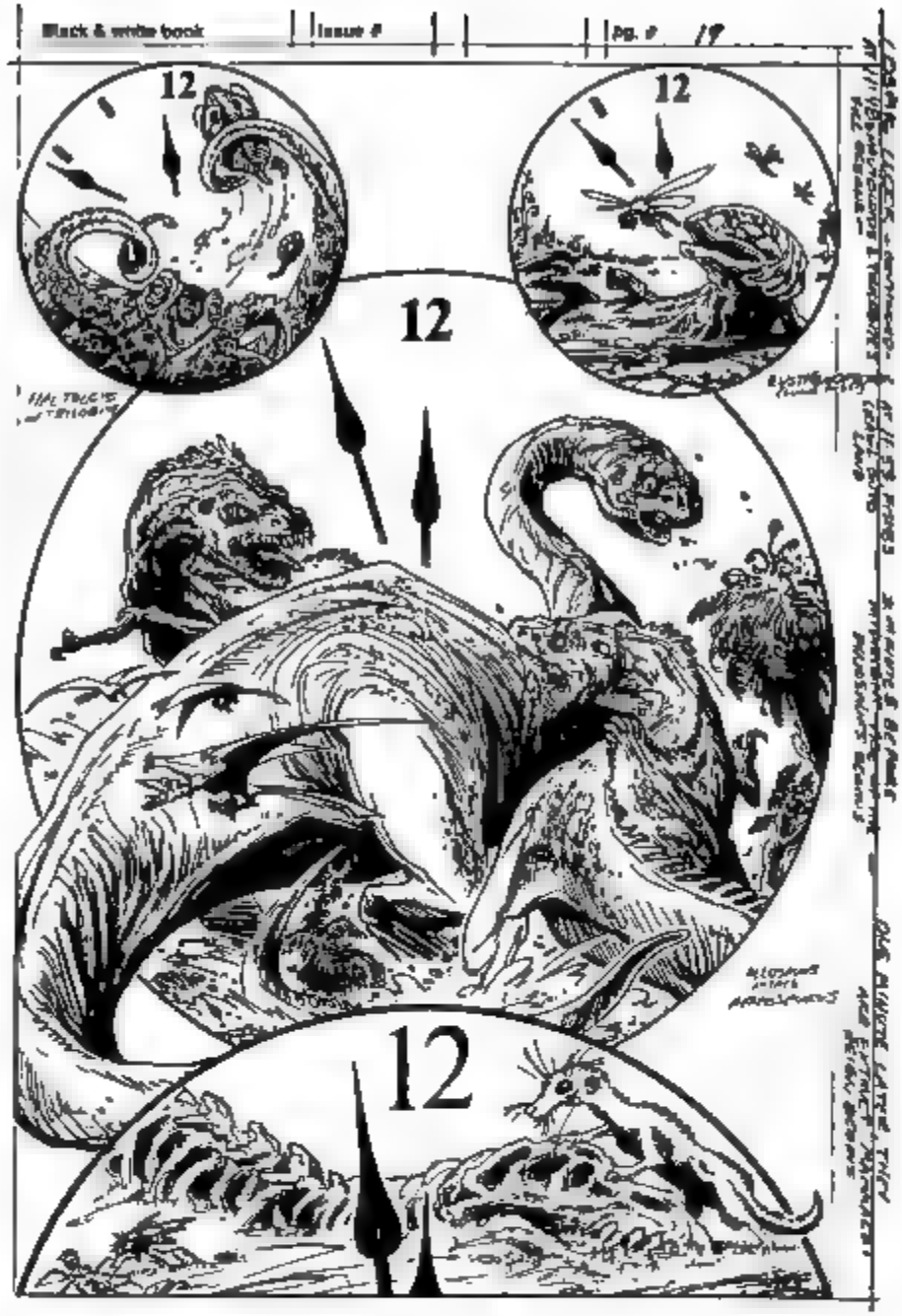
S:Yes, marvellous film, where the message comes to you by you looking at all this nuclear propaganda and saying,"Oh my God, they're fucking mad." It was edited in such a way that you made connections that certainly weren't intended With the Nuke-Face Papers it's the same sort of thing. NukeFace is saying all these pro-nuke stuff and you re looking at this drunken,irradiated wino who's saying it. We needn t say more

We very consciously put American Gothic together in seperate stories because we didn't want to fall into the trap that Marty and Tom had with their Swamp Thing. That was a 13-part story about this girl who was the anti-Christ. It dragged on for so long that you couldn't pick up an issue near the end and read it, and get a satisfactory read unless you d read all the prior parts We didn t want that to happen. You could read just the Werewolf story and you needn't know what had gone on before or after to get a full emotional experiance. We very consciously aimed for that.

We did a lot of the plotting for American Gothic when Alan can out to Vermont in August '84. We plotted the vampire story walking through the sunlit Vermont woods with my 1-year old daughter Mia holding my hand while we were discussing the reproductive cycles of vampires. We had a lot of input into that story, but, as ever, the specific plotting was Alan s tapestry to weave. The heart of the werewolf story, about the woman, is Alan's, but the catalyst of the story was an idea I've had since I was at High School: that the menstrual and moon cycles are linked for female werewolves

P Alan gets a lot of help from you, John and Rick Veitch for research for stories, but do you research your art?

S:I do too much. Neither John nor Alan have had the opportunity to visit Louisiana, but I was able to spend a whole day in Houma, where Swamp Thing is set. I took copious notes of license plates, and how they looked, and photos of the place. In fact we've just had a letter from someone who lived in Houma saying,"That is the hospital. That is the police station." To me, for fantasy to work it has to be grounded in reality, so I research to excess, and I love it that someone in Houma actually picked up on what we were doing.



Above: A page from the aborted Titan Comic.

Even back when I was doing the Dracula story with Steve Perry for Bizarre Adventures I found and read every single Dracula story that Marvel had put out because I wanted to pick up every link that was vital to what we were doing Long after Steve had had enough I still devoured more

P Constantine is reminiscent of Jerry Cornelius.

S:I'd read the Michael Moorcock books but I didn't make the connection until yesterday s panel. John and I just wanted to draw a character who looked like Sting because he has such a good face and it's perfect for the mood of the book. If you look at Swamp Thing 35, on page 21 Sting is behind Abby in panel 2. We said we were going to keep putting him in until Alan came up with something, and he did. What he came up with was far beyond our hopes and dreams. Constantine is such a strong character that we're discussing the possibility of doing a mini-series with him, which would give us an excuse to do the Demon or other characters we want to do. We really wanted to do a Demon mini-series but Paul Levitz told us very ominously, "That's someone elses."((Matt Wagner's in fact))

P:Wouldn't you have difficulties with Sting himself if you did have a Constantine mini-series?

S:Yes, we're walking a fine line there. We should contact

Above: A convention sketch.

him, or maybe he'll contact us after this. We'd never use his face to sell Swamp Thing, so he doesn't appear on the covers, and he never will, because that constitutes an infringement on Sting's image. His face would then be selling the book. The case that comes to mind is Gil Kane's His Name Is Savage, which had Lee Marvin on the cover. I'd heard rumours, but I don't know whether they're true or not, that Marvin s agent contacted them and put a stop to it. Another example is Paul Gulacy on Master of Kung Fu. That's Marlon Brando and Bruce Lee, but they never sold the book with the sham that it was a Bruce Lee comic. That's the fine line we're walking

F:The conclusion to American Gothic will be Swamp Thing 50, your last with John Totleben. What then?

S After 50 I hope to do an issue by myself. John's going to do a couple on his own, and the Annual (with an appearance by Batman) but I've already got other work lined up I haven't discussed it with Alan yet but I m hoping to talk him into a dinosaur story. I've been drawing dinosaurs since I was 4 yet I've only had two comic jobs that I've had dinosaurs in all the years that I've been drawing comics. In fact I m starting a dinosaur story for Carl Potts Amazing High Adventure as soon as I go home

John and I are not ending our relationship but we're ending this pencilling and inking team with issue 50. We're discussing with Karen Berger the possibility of doing Alan s last issue (62 or 64), but that's by no means certain. We d do it the way that Rick and I worked together, laying it out together, which would involve John in a way he hasn't been involved before. Then we'd do stuff by post, passing pages back and forth, and then finish it off face-to-face. So it ll be a more organic mesh, and I m really excited about that.

After this John doesn t want to ink anyone else for a while because he hasn't got a body of work to fall back on from before Swamp Thing, while I have. Swamp Thing is the first time he's come into the public eye, and to be typed as an inker, or as a penciller, when he s a good all round artist in his own right is senseless. I'll be getting back to inking. However, I ll be just pencilling the Cloak and Dagger Graphic Novel. I don't know who's inking it, but Terry Austin had first refusal and he turned it down because he needs a precise penciller, which I m not. My second choice is Al Williamson. And I would love to work with Bill Sienkiewicz - I think he and I think a lot alike in going for the gut, in going for the maximum emotional response, but I don't think that'll happen on Cloak and Dagger, if at all. I'll pencil the pages in 3 months. It'd take another 3 months to ink it as well, and I d rather not. I don't want to come over as though I'm not into the job but one of the key reasons I m doing it is for the financial renumeration, which is so great that it'll put me at a level where I can go back to DC and demand a bit more money. I am in a position now where I need to do that. Swamp Thing is very popular in the fan press, we've got great reviews, and the awards are gratifying, but we haven't earned a cent of royalty. The first royalty I earned was from the Who's Who. My wife, Nancy s reaction was,"You mean those sell better than comics with stories?" which unfortunately is the case

The other babies I've got right now are two mini-series proposals with two writers. One is sure to go through and the one I'm more excited about is Grunt, with Tom Veitch (Rick's brother) who hasn't written comics since he and Greg Irons split up after the U/g scene started to wane. The first issue is like the reverse of E.T. - a little boy has a large, ugly dangerous monster that he's hiding in his closet. It goes from there into a wonderful dark fantasy that involves a journey down, into a mountain and under the planet, into these underworlds that are down there.

I'm also putting together a horror detective mini-series with Jack Butterworth. Jack used to work for Warren in the mid-70s on titles like Eerie and Creepy Jack sent me copies of some of his stuff, after I d met him, and I was surprised to see some of Richard Corben s better strips in there. Jack s title for the book is October Black, which is too much like Nathanial Dusk, so I've asked him to come up with a new title Basically Toby is a newspaper reporter, and she's frustrated because she s constantly being relegated to the family section of the paper, with recipes and the like She aches for a hard news story and the story she gets is a bit too wild to be printed. It s a sort of extrapolation

Left: Dinosaurs! Right: The Patchwork Man for Who's Who.

on Stephen King's short story Gray Matter which was about nasty little bits in people's beer that turns you into a human fungus It starts in a brewery

F I m sure you ll enjoy doing the research for that

S Yes, indeed I ll have to go to a lot of breweries. Anyway, a beer company has bought this abandoned brewery and started refurbishing it Unknown to the company the site had been sold previously to the government, who have a secret abandoned laboratory underground But there s vestigal remains lying around from the biological weaponry experiments A bit of that has got into the vats upstairs and we take it from there There s also a psychological horror story as a major subplot a love relationship between Toby and a man the reader knows is stark fucking raving mad She s a sort of female take on Kolchak The Night Stalker.

F That's just been shown for the first time over here

S Really? The Kolchak movies, The Night Stalker and The Night Strangler, were brilliant. As TV movies they were better than most theatrical films. I still enjoy a lot of the director Dan Curtis' work Dark Shadows was his first

F That s never made it over here, but I did see his TV movie, The Norliss Tapes, which starred Roy Thinnes.

S:That s an interesting film. A follow-up to Kolchak really. Curtis was one of the first film directors in the 70s who was able to blend the supernatural old trappings with a real physical presence - there was that moment in The Norliss Tapes when the walking dead man just rips the door off the car.

F:It's when a perfectly normal situation is set on it's side by a simple thing that's quite jarring. I think Swamp Thing does the same sort of thing with the characters

S Right. I had an interesting conversation with Skip Morrow, who lives in my home town He does the "I Hate Cats" books, which were his first claim to fame Did they come over here?

F We had "101 Uses For A Dead Cat "

S.That was a rip-off of what Skip had done. Anyway, when we first met and were comparing our work Skip pointed out that the pacing in the humour that he does is the same pacing that I do on my stripe For a joke to make you laugh or a scare to make you shudder it's a building up to a moment when the reader recognises something. Something that s very familiar to them that you re showing them in a different light, that can bring out a laugh or a shudder. We can throw all sorts of godawful monsters at you and it's not going to do anything unless it s put in the right trappings, and Alan does it beautifully. As you say, the characters are believable people up to a point, and when you bring in these fantastic elements into the context of the reality that you accept, then it has weight

In Roman Polanski's film, The Tenant, there s one moment where the tenant is lying on his bed and he goes to touch a cup of tea, and it's just a painting It s so subtle I saw it with Nancy, and she didn't see it, but I was shaking.

F It s not a logical thing. It s an illogical thing that s added

S:And that s the power of it.

F:It wasn't until after Love and Death (Swamp Thing 29) that I realised that Abby had had sex, not

Above: Art for an advert. Opposite: Pencils for The Demon by Steve and John which they had to do to get permission to use the character in Swamp Thing.

only with her dead Uncle, but with insects, and that's what she was trying to scrub off.

S:And insects have some of the most bizarre reproductive cycles on the planet It's frightening, and it s more powerful because it wasn't said to you outright You had to put the pieces together I think that's what Alan has brought to horror comics that didn t exist before - to engage the reader's imagination We did actually show you the head full of bugs in the mirror a couple of times but you didn't make the connection until the end.

F:You're planning to do a Swamp Thing/Mr. Monster team-up.

S:When Alan handed in the script for Mr Monster 3, and I did the cover, Mike Gilbert suggested that we do the team up It s perfect because we've got a sympathetic monster that people sympathise with, and we ve got Mr. Monster who'll shoot anything in sight that looks even a little bit out of the norm. I think the blend of humour and horror will work well I don't know whether John 11 choose to be involved but I ve already told Mike not to do it without me. Alan's certainly into it. It looked for a while that DC weren't interested in helping the little guys, Eclipse. What made the difference was that Cat Yronwode and Jenette Kahn met in San Diego. They both collect plastic jewellry, of all things, and they started chatting Because of this Janette said we should do the team-up. It's amazing what happens behind the scenes, that people will never, ever know, that actually leads to things happening

I don't know if it will happen in Swamp Thing or Mr Monster Obviously Eclipse want it to happen in a DC book because it 11 reach far more people than they ever could, and DC would prefer to publish it because it's another Swamp Thing book

F What other plans do you have?

S John and I hope to package a horror book, one that goes to the edge, beyond what we re doing in Swamp Thing. There s a bit of a revival that seems to be gaining speed Twisted Tales led to Tales of Terror Creepy made a tentative attempt to come back

F House of Mystery is back

S House of Mystery editor Sal Amendola is very frustrated because DC are insisting that he uses up all the inventory that they paid for Well that's the shit that killed the book in the first place. If that's the sort of material that s presented to the people who are hungry for horror then it's just going to die before it gets out the starting gate. We need people like Clive Barker, who we met last Saturday He s the best horror writer in the English language and we've read them all. He's original, frightening, powerful Clive is a big comics fan and he d love to do some. You've got writers like Clive, Alan, and Jack Butterworth. As for artists, among our peers alone there s Tim Truman, Tom Yeates, Rick Veitch. We could put together a knockout book. We d also like to get the people who did stuff for the U/g comics Skull and Slow Death, like Spain Rodriges and S Clay Wilson. Those guys can't find work It's ridiculous that people like Spain Rodriges who's an incredible artist, is doing covers for Screw to make a living. Cat and the people at Tales of Terror are afraid to contact these guys. These are the people who should be drawing the books

F:Their work was always close to the edge, which is why Slow Death is still being reprinted

S Exactly. That s still vital and powerful stuff Alan, beyond the edge, these guys have a note of humour that is important to make the horror palatable It s not so humorous that you're going to laugh at the stories, but after

Above: A convention sketch. Opposite: The cover to Swamp Thing 51 before all the blurb is added.

going off the deep end it allows you to come back.

We hope to put this together but, with Denis Kitchen's Death Rattle and Archie Goodwin's proposed horror book on the Epic line, these things may be funnelled into those projects.

Horror comics haven't broken the 50s EC mold. House of Mystery and the like still have watered-down versions of EC stories with the O. Henry twists. People can shout out the endings from the first panels now because it just doesn't work anymore. There's been 2 or 3 generations of horror writers since then so why not make use of them? In Swamp Thing we very consciously tried to break from that tradition altogether and began to set new parameters on what could be done in horror fiction. To some extent we succeeded but I hope to go further. ●

And here are a few more bits of information about the cover and Steve's upcoming projects: "Swamp Thing is still part of my work load, though as cover artist only...Grumm, creation of myself and Tom Veitch, is in the bottom left corner, above him Cardinal Sin, who may or may not figure into John Totleben and my project with Clive Barker (sorry, as yet it's secret), the 'dry rot' head is indicative of John's and my own horror anthology comic due to come out by Halloween of '86, tentatively entitled Shivers or Faces of Fear (Adults Only, no-holds-barred). I'm drawing an issue of Badger this year, featuring a new lycanthropic character, Dire Wolf. Mike Baron script of course. Also doing a particularly vile little 3-pager for a new horror comic (title unknown to me) coming from Fantacc this Summer. My story is entitled Cottonmouth, which tells all, in a way, though you'll never guess it."

N·E·X·T I·S·S·U·E

WILL EISNER

GILBERT HERNANDEZ

DAVE SIM

50p (70p by post) OUT AUG.

NEED I SAY MORE?

ALAN DAVIS
80